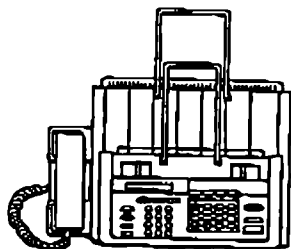




## National Coalition for the Homeless



### FAX TRANSMISSION SHEET

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# DATA ON HOMELESS CHILDREN AND YOUTH

|                                                           | 1989                                                                              | 1991                                                                              | 1993                                                                              |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>TOTAL NUMBER OF HOMELESS CHILDREN AND YOUTH (K-12)</b> | 272,773                                                                           | 327,416                                                                           | 744,266                                                                           |
| <b>NUMBERS OF HOMELESS BY GRADE LEVEL</b>                 |                                                                                   |                                                                                   |                                                                                   |
| Elementary (K-6)                                          | 132,959                                                                           | 158,664                                                                           | 425,465                                                                           |
| Middle/Junior High (7-9)                                  | 57,731                                                                            | 69,224                                                                            | 166,595                                                                           |
| High School (10-12)                                       | 70,071                                                                            | 79,844                                                                            | 139,430                                                                           |
| Unspecified Grade Level                                   | 12,012                                                                            | 19,684                                                                            | 12,776                                                                            |
| <b>PERCENTAGES OF HOMELESS BY GRADE LEVEL</b>             |                                                                                   |                                                                                   |                                                                                   |
| Elementary (K-6)                                          | 48.7%                                                                             | 48.6%                                                                             | 57.2%                                                                             |
| Middle/Junior High (7-9)                                  | 21.2%                                                                             | 21.2%                                                                             | 22.4%                                                                             |
| High School (10-12)                                       | 25.7%                                                                             | 24.4%                                                                             | 18.7%                                                                             |
| Unspecified Grade Level                                   | 4.4%                                                                              | 5.8%                                                                              | 1.7%                                                                              |
| <b>SCHOOL ATTENDANCE</b>                                  |                                                                                   |                                                                                   |                                                                                   |
| Percentage not attending school during their homelessness | 28%                                                                               | 20%                                                                               | 23%                                                                               |
| <b>SOURCES</b>                                            | 1990 Report to Congress, based on data submitted by the States in December, 1989. | 1992 Report to Congress, based on data submitted by the States in December, 1990. | 1995 Report to Congress, based on data submitted by the States in December, 1993. |

More  
recent  
data- 40 states → From "America's Homeless Children: Will  
Their Future Be Different," by NCH,  
1997

| STATE              | Estimated<br>Number of<br>Homeless<br>Children (1993*) | Number of Homeless<br>Children Receiving<br>Direct Services, 1996-97<br>School Year | % Homeless Children<br>Receiving Direct<br>Educational Services |
|--------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|
| ALASKA             | 2,000-2,500**                                          | 1,200                                                                               | 48 - 60%                                                        |
| ARIZONA            | 11,914                                                 | 2,069                                                                               | 17%                                                             |
| CALIFORNIA         | 137,037                                                | 15,000                                                                              | 11%                                                             |
| COLORADO           | 4,356                                                  | 1,900                                                                               | 44%                                                             |
| CONNECTICUT        | 5,090                                                  | 980                                                                                 | 19%                                                             |
| GEORGIA            | 9,482                                                  | 10,000                                                                              | ---                                                             |
| IDAHO              | 5,155                                                  | 1,700                                                                               | 33%                                                             |
| ILLINOIS           | 33,000-45,000***                                       | 4,200                                                                               | 9 - 13%                                                         |
| INDIANA            | 15,302                                                 | 2,065                                                                               | 13%                                                             |
| IOWA               | 9,849****                                              | 2,835                                                                               | 29%                                                             |
| KANSAS             | 8,236                                                  | 1,250                                                                               | 15%                                                             |
| KENTUCKY           | 5,781*****                                             | 2,860                                                                               | 49%                                                             |
| LOUISIANA          | 13,546                                                 | 15,000                                                                              | n/a                                                             |
| MAINE              | 8,337                                                  | 200                                                                                 | 2%                                                              |
| MARYLAND           | 10,994*****                                            | 3,949                                                                               | 36%                                                             |
| MASSACHU-<br>SETTS | 9,087                                                  | 1,561                                                                               | 16%                                                             |
| MICHIGAN           | 139,555                                                | 4,500                                                                               | 3%                                                              |
| MINNESOTA          | 20,802                                                 | 7,200                                                                               | 35%                                                             |
| MISSOURI           | 8,000*****                                             | 6,500                                                                               | 81%                                                             |
| MONTANA            | 2,028                                                  | 210                                                                                 | 10%                                                             |
| NEBRASKA           | 6,101                                                  | 1,298                                                                               | 21%                                                             |
| NEVADA             | 1,596*****                                             | 300                                                                                 | 19%                                                             |
| NEW JERSEY         | 17,132                                                 | 1,550                                                                               | 9%                                                              |
| NEW YORK           | 22,776                                                 | 22,000                                                                              | ---                                                             |

|                |                  |           |               |
|----------------|------------------|-----------|---------------|
| NORTH CAROLINA | 6,274            | 1,500     | 24%           |
| OHIO           | 27,416           | 10,000    | 36%           |
| OREGON         | 20,682*****      | 7,500     | 36%           |
| PENNSYLVANIA   | 17,782           | 9,844     | 55%           |
| RHODE ISLAND   | 1,500-2,000***** | 195       | 89%           |
| SOUTH CAROLINA | 5,307            | 1,250     | 23%           |
| SOUTH DAKOTA   | 1,455            | 406+      | 28%           |
| TENNESSEE      | 1372             | 5,900     | ---           |
| TEXAS          | 123,738          | 15-16,000 | 12-13%        |
| UTAH           | 9,969            | 20,232    | ---           |
| VERMONT        | 726              | 135       | 19%           |
| VIRGINIA       | 14,178*****      | 2,346     | 17%           |
| WASHINGTON     | 16,471           | 1,762     | 11%           |
| WEST VIRGINIA  | 5,298            | 890-910   | 17%           |
| WISCONSIN      | 8,245            | 2,013     | 24%           |
| WYOMING        | 1,474            | 185       | 13%           |
| TOTALS         | 782,263          | 189,485   | 24% (average) |

\* 1993 data from the 1995 U.S. Report to Congress on the Education for Homeless Children and Youth Program.  
 \*\* 1997 estimate from Alaska Department of Education.  
 \*\*\* 1996 data from the Illinois Coalition to End Homelessness  
 \*\*\*\* 1996 data from the Iowa Department of Education  
 \*\*\*\*\* 1997 data from the Kentucky Department of Education  
 \* 1996 data from the Maryland Department of Human Resources  
 \* 1996 data from the Missouri Department of Education  
 \* 1996 data from the Nevada Office for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth  
 \* 1996/97 data from the Oregon Housing and Community Service Department  
 \* 1997 estimate from the Rhode Island Coalition for the Homeless  
 \* 1995 data from the Virginia Coalition for the Homeless

# How Many People Experience Homelessness?

Fact Sheet #2

January 1997

Published by the National Coalition for the Homeless

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Many people call the National Coalition for the Homeless to find out how many people are homeless in the United States. There is no easy answer to this question, and in fact, the question itself is misleading. In most cases, homelessness is a temporary circumstance -- not a permanent condition. A more appropriate measure of the magnitude of homelessness is therefore how many people experience homelessness, not how many people "are" homeless.

Studies of homelessness are complicated by problems of definitions and methodology. This fact sheet describes definitions of homelessness, methodologies for counting homeless people, and recent estimates of homelessness. Additional resources for further study are also provided.

## DEFINITIONS

As a result of methodological and financial constraints, most studies are limited to counting people who are literally homeless -- that is, in shelters or on the streets. While this approach may yield useful information about the number of people who use services such as shelters and soup kitchens, or who are easy to locate on the street, it can result in underestimates of homelessness. Many people who lack a stable, permanent residence have few shelter options because shelters are filled to capacity or are unavailable. A recent study of 29 U.S. cities found that in 1996, 20% of all requests for emergency shelter went unmet due to lack of resources (Waxman and Hinderliter, 1996). In addition, a review of homelessness in 50 cities found that in virtually every city, the city's official estimated number of homeless people greatly exceeded the number of emergency shelter and transitional housing spaces (National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty, 1996). Moreover, there are few or no shelters in rural areas of the United States, despite significant levels of homelessness (Aron and Fitchen, 1996). As a result of these and other factors, many people who lack permanent housing are forced to live with relatives and friends in crowded, temporary arrangements. People living in unstable housing arrangements who lack a permanent place to stay are experiencing a kind of homelessness, but because they are not "literally homeless," they will not be counted.

## METHODOLOGY

Researchers use different methods to measure homelessness. One method attempts to count all the people who are literally homeless on a given day or during a given

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week (point-in-time counts). A second method of counting homeless people examines the number of people who are homeless over a given period of time (period prevalence counts).

Choosing between point-in-time counts and period-prevalence counts has significant implications for understanding the magnitude and dynamics of homelessness. The high turnover in the homeless population documented by recent studies (see below) suggests that many more people experience homelessness than previously thought, and that most of these people do not remain homeless. Because point-in-time studies give just a "snapshot" picture of homelessness, they only count those who are homeless at a particular time. Over time, however, some people will find housing and escape homelessness while new people will lose housing and become homeless. Systemic social and economic factors (prolonged unemployment or sudden loss of a job, lack of affordable housing, domestic violence, etc.) are frequently responsible for these episodes of homelessness. Point-in-time studies do not accurately identify these intermittently homeless people, and therefore tend to overestimate the proportion of people who are chronically homeless — particularly those who suffer from severe mental illness and/or substance abuse and who therefore have a much harder time escaping homelessness and finding permanent housing. For these reasons, point-in-time counts are often criticized as misrepresenting the magnitude and nature of homelessness.

There is another important methodological issue that should be considered. Regardless of the time period over which the study was conducted, many people will not be counted because they are not in places researchers can easily find. This group of people, often referred to as "the unsheltered" or "hidden" homeless, frequently stay in automobiles, camp grounds, or other places that researchers cannot effectively search. For instance, a national study of formerly homeless people found that the most common places people who had been literally homeless stayed were vehicles (59.2%) and makeshift housing, such as tents, boxes, caves, or boxcars (24.6%) (Link et al., 1995). This suggests that homeless counts may miss significant numbers of people who are literally homeless, as well as those living in doubled-up situations.

### **NATIONAL ESTIMATES OF HOMELESSNESS**

**500,000 - 600,000 (1988)**

The most widely cited example of a point-in-time estimate is the approximately 500,000-600,000 homeless people found in shelters, eating at soup kitchens, or congregating on the street during one week in 1988 (Burt and Cohen, 1989).

A variation on this estimate uses a projected annual rate of increase of 5% to produce a 1996 estimate of 760,000 people homeless on any given night, and 1.2 -2

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million people who experience homelessness during one year (National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty, 1996).

### **Seven Million (1985-1990)**

In 1990, a national telephone survey identified formerly homeless people and produced life-time and five-year prevalence estimates of homelessness. Seven percent of the respondents reported that they had been literally homeless at some point in their lives, and three percent reported being homeless at some point between 1985-1990 (Link et al., 1994). The Clinton Administration's Priority Home! The Federal Plan to Break the Cycle of Homelessness uses this data, corrected to include children, to estimate that between 4.95 million to 9.32 million people (with a mid-point of 7 million) experienced homelessness in the latter half of the 1980s.

A second study was undertaken in 1994 to refine the analysis with more explicit definitions and detailed information. This study found that 6.5% (12 million adults nationwide) of the respondents had been literally homeless at some point in their lives, and that 3.6% (6.6 million adults nationwide) of the respondents had experienced homelessness (literal or doubled up) between 1989-1994 (Link et al., 1995). Thus, it appears that 12 million of the adult residents of the U.S. have been literally homeless at some point in their lives.

### **Three Percent (1994)**

Dennis Culhane's study of turnover rates in shelters in New York City and Philadelphia is another example of a period-prevalence count. This study revealed that three percent of Philadelphia's population used the public shelter system between 1990 and 1992, and that in New York, three percent of the population received shelter between 1988-1992 (Culhane et al., 1994). The study also found that in New York City, a single shelter bed accomodates four different people in the course of a year; in Philadelphia, each bed accomodates six different persons per year.

A study by Martha Burt compared these rates with data from seven other jurisdictions (Burt, 1994). The comparison showed that the New York City and Philadelphia rates fall well within the range of data from other regions of the country.

### **CONCLUSION**

By its very nature, homelessness is impossible to measure with 100% accuracy. More important than knowing the precise number of people who experience homelessness is our progress in ending it. Recent studies suggest that the United States generates homelessness at a much higher rate than previously thought. Our task in ending homelessness is more important now than ever.

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# Who Is Homeless?

Fact Sheet #3

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This fact sheet reviews definitions of homelessness and describes the demographic characteristics of persons who experience homelessness. A list of resources for further study is also provided.

## DEFINITIONS

According to the Stewart B. McKinney Act, 42 U.S.C. § 11301, et seq. (1994), a person is considered homeless who "lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate night-time residence and; and... has a primary night-time residency that is: (A) a supervised publicly or privately operated shelter designed to provide temporary living accommodations... (B) an institution that provides a temporary residence for individuals intended to be institutionalized, or (C) a public or private place not designed for, or ordinarily used as, a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings." 42 U.S.C. § 11302(a) The term "homeless individual" does not include any individual imprisoned or otherwise detained pursuant to an Act of Congress or a state law." 42 U.S.C. § 11302(c)

This definition is interpreted by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to include only those persons who are literally homeless -- that is, on the streets or in shelters -- and persons who face imminent eviction (within a week) from a private dwelling or institution and who have no subsequent residence or resources to obtain housing. The McKinney definition of homelessness well serves large urban communities, where tens of thousands of people are literally homeless. However, it may prove problematic for those persons who are homeless in areas of the country, such as rural areas, where there are few shelters. People experiencing homelessness in these areas are less likely to live on the street or in a shelter, and more likely to live with relatives in overcrowded or substandard housing (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1996). Restricting definitions of homelessness to include only those who are literally homeless may exclude many non-urban communities from accessing federal dollars to address homelessness.

## DEMOGRAPHICS

Two trends are largely responsible for the rise in homelessness over the past 15-20 years: a growing shortage of affordable rental housing and a simultaneous increase in poverty. Persons living in poverty are most at risk of becoming homeless, and demographic groups who are more likely to experience poverty are also more likely to experience homelessness. Recent demographic statistics are summarized below.

### **AGE:**

In 1996, the U.S. Conference of Mayors' survey of homelessness in 29 cities found that children under the age of 18 accounted for 27% of the urban homeless population (Waxman and Hinderliter, 1996). A 1987 Urban Institute study found that 51% of the homeless population were between the ages of 31 and 50 (Burt, 1989); other studies have found percentages of homeless persons aged 55 to 60 ranging from 2.5% to 19.4% (Institute of Medicine, 1988).

### **GENDER:**

Most studies show that single homeless adults are more likely to be male than female. In 1996, the U.S. Conference of Mayors' survey found that single men comprised 45% of the homeless population and single women 14% (Waxman and Hinderliter, 1996).

**FAMILIES:**

The number of homeless families with children has increased significantly over the past decade; families with children are currently the fastest growing group of the homeless population. Families with children constitute approximately 40% of people who become homeless (Shinn and Weitzman, 1996). In its 1996 survey of 29 American cities, the U.S. Conference of Mayors found that families comprised 38% of the homeless population. These proportions are likely to be higher in rural areas; research indicates that families, single mothers, and children make up the largest group of people who are homeless in rural areas (Vissing, 1996).

**ETHNICITY:**

In its 1996 survey of 29 cities, the U.S. Conference of Mayor found that the homeless population was 57% African-American, 30% Caucasian, 10% Hispanic, 2% Native American, and 1% Asian (Waxman and Hinderliter, 1996). Like the total U.S. population, the ethnic makeup of homeless populations varies according to geographic location. For example, people experiencing homelessness in rural areas are much more likely to be white; homelessness among Native Americans and migrant workers is also largely a rural phenomenon (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1996).

**VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE:**

A 1990 Ford Foundation study found that 50% of homeless women and children were fleeing abuse (Zorza, 1991). More recent local estimates put the range of homeless women and children fleeing abuse at 25-35% (National Coalition for the Homeless, 1997).

**VETERANS:**

Research indicates that 40% of homeless men have served in the armed forces, as compared to 34% of the general adult male population (Rosenheck et al., 1996). In 1996, the U.S. Conference of Mayors' survey of 29 American cities found that 19% of the urban homeless population were veterans (Waxman and Hinderliter, 1996).

**PERSONS WITH MENTAL ILLNESS:**

Approximately 20-25% of the single adult homeless population suffers from some form of severe and persistent mental illness (Koegel et al., 1996). According to the Federal Task Force on Homelessness and Severe Mental Illness, only 5-7% of homeless persons with mental illness require institutionalization; most can live in the community with the appropriate supportive housing options (Federal Task Force on Homelessness and Severe Mental Illness, 1992).

**PERSONS SUFFERING FROM ADDICTION DISORDERS:**

Surveys of homeless populations conducted during the 1980s found consistently high rates of addiction, particularly among single men; however, recent research has called the results of those studies into question (Koegel et al., 1996). Briefly put, the studies that produced high prevalence rates greatly over-represented long-term shelter users and single men, and used lifetime rather than current measures of addiction. While there is no generally accepted "magic number" with respect to the prevalence of addiction disorders among homeless adults, the frequently cited figure of about 65% is probably at least double the real rate for current addiction disorders among all adults who are homeless in a year. In 1995, about 22% of Health Care for the Homeless clients were diagnosed as suffering from substance abuse disorders (Bureau of Primary Health Care, 1995).

**EMPLOYMENT:**

In 1996, the U.S. Conference of Mayors found that at least 19% of the homeless population were employed (Waxman and Hinderliter, 1996). Declining wages have put housing out of reach for many

workers: in no state does a full-time minimum wage job cover the costs of a one-bedroom unit at Fair Market Rent, and in 45 states and the District of Columbia, families would need to earn at least double the minimum wage in order to afford a two-bedroom unit at Fair Market Rent (Kaufman, 1996). Thus, inadequate income leaves many people homeless.

## **IMPLICATIONS**

As this fact sheet makes clear, people who become homeless do not fit one general description. However, homeless persons do have certain shared basic needs, including affordable housing, adequate incomes, and health care. Some homeless persons may need additional services such as mental health or drug treatment in order to remain securely housed. All of these needs must be met to prevent and to end homelessness.

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