

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

The State of Homelessness in America 2013 examines trends in homelessness between 2011 and 2012 as well as the economic, housing, and demographic context in which homelessness changes over time. The report shows that, overall, the homeless population decreased by less than 1 percent, but this is not the full story. While the number of people experiencing homelessness as part of a family increased slightly, the number of individuals experiencing chronic homelessness and those identifying as veterans decreased significantly.

The mixed findings may be related to policy changes as well as to the economic climate in which these changes are taking place. Increased federal investment in effective solutions, such as permanent supportive housing, has been aimed at veterans and chronically homeless individuals. Also, during this time period, flexible federal resources were available to communities through the Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-housing Program (HPRP) to help prevent and end homelessness for families and individuals. Despite these resources, increased competition for housing resources and growing housing cost burden combined with increases in the size of the population living in doubled-up situations and poor single-adult-headed families make attaining and maintaining housing more difficult for families and single adults who are not chronically homeless.

Report Contents

The National Alliance to End Homelessness has published a series of reports chronicling changes in the levels of homelessness in the nation, individual states, and the District of Columbia, in an effort to chart the nation's progress in ending homelessness. The most recent of these, *The State of Homelessness in America* series, not only examines changes in national- and state-level homelessness data, but also provides data on related economic and demographic trends.

The State of Homelessness in America 2013, the third in this series, uses the most recently available national data from a variety of sources: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, and National Association of State Budget Officers. This report includes three chapters: Chapter One presents data on homelessness at the national and state levels using point-in-time estimates of the overall homeless population and subpopulations, measured in 2011 and 2012; Chapter Two describes economic and housing factors that impact homelessness including housing cost and unemployment; and Chapter Three describes demographic and household factors that impact homelessness including population groups that are at increased risk.

A series of appendices provide detailed, state-level information on all homelessness data and contextual factors described in this report.

Major Findings

HOMELESSNESS

Using the most recently available national data on homelessness, the 2011 and 2012 point-in-time counts as reported by jurisdictions to HUD, this report chronicles changes in overall homelessness and in homeless subpopulations between 2011 and 2012. Point-in-time methodologies vary and are imperfect and, as such, the aggregated numbers do not represent a precise count of homeless people. The counts, however, when compared over time, provide a way to assess whether the homeless population has increased or decreased.

- From 2011 to 2012, the nation's homeless population decreased by 0.4 percent or about 2,235 people. At a point in time in January 2012, 633,782 people were experiencing homelessness. There was a decrease in all homeless subpopulations with the exception of persons in families.
- The largest decreases were 6.8 percent among individuals identified as chronically homeless and 7.2 percent among veterans.
- The national rate of homelessness was 20 homeless people per 10,000 people in the general population. The rate for veterans was 29 homeless veterans per 10,000 veterans in the general population.
- A majority of people identified as homeless were staying in emergency shelters or transitional housing, but 38 percent were unsheltered, living on the streets, or in cars, abandoned buildings, or other places not intended for human habitation. The size of the unsheltered population remained basically unchanged between 2011 and 2012.
- There was no change in the number of homeless family households, however the size of the average homeless family grew so the overall number of people in homeless families increased 1.4 percent.
- While the overall homeless population decreased between 2011 and 2012 nationally, 28 states and the District of Columbia saw increases.

ECONOMIC AND HOUSING FACTORS

Homelessness is essentially caused by the inability of households to pay for housing. In recognition of this, this report examines a variety of economic and housing indicators that affect people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Each of these factors is examined for the years 2010 and 2011, the most recent for which data are available.

- Nationally, median household income decreased by 1.3 percent between 2010 and 2011, from \$51,144 to \$50,502. While the majority of states reported a decrease in median household income, 14 states reported increases.
- Between 2010 and 2011, the national poverty rate increased from 15.3 percent to 15.9 percent. This represents an almost 5 percent increase in the number of people living in poverty; more than 48 million people were living in poverty in 2011.
- The unemployment rate decreased from 9.6 percent to 8.9 percent between 2010 and 2011, which represents a decrease of more than one million people.
- While spending on Medicaid increased between 2010 and 2011, spending on public assistance decreased.
- Among the 50 states and the District of Columbia, 38 reported an increase in the fair market rent between 2010 and 2011. Nationally, the average fair market rent for a two-bedroom housing unit increased by 1.5 percent.
- In 2011, more than 6.5 million households were spending more than 50 percent of their income for housing expenses, which was a 5.5 percent increase from 2010.
- Approximately one-third of households were renting their homes in 2011, a slight increase from 2010. Correspondingly, the rental vacancy rates decreased from 10.6 percent to 9.7 percent during this time period.

DEMOGRAPHIC AND HOUSEHOLD FACTORS

A number of demographic groups have an increased risk of homelessness, including poor households that are living in doubled-up situations, poor single-person households, and poor family households with only one adult present. Each of these factors is examined for the years 2010 and 2011, the most recent for which they are available.

- Between 2010 and 2011, 40 states reported an increase in the number of poor people living in doubled-up households. Nationally, there was a 9.4 percent increase.
- At the national level, there was an almost 6 percent increase in the number of poor single-person households. In 2011, 12.9 percent of all households living in poverty were comprised of a single person.
- More than one-half of the households living in poverty were family households with a single adult present. The number of these households increased by almost 6 percent between 2010 and 2011.
- In 2011, 48.6 percent of adults living in poverty were accessing safety net benefits, which represents an 11.5 percent increase from 2010.

Moving Forward

The State of Homelessness 2013 identifies a number of challenges and opportunities in the efforts to prevent and end homelessness in the United States. Scant decreases in the overall size of the homeless population and the rate of homelessness between 2011 and 2012 remind us that there is still a great deal of work to be done. However, the decreases in chronic and veteran homelessness indicate that, with federal, state, and local investment in strategies proven to end homelessness, progress can be made. The ongoing and increased development of permanent supportive housing, a proven solution to ending homelessness for people with disabilities, is bringing down chronic and veteran homelessness numbers in communities across the country.

Emphasis needs to be placed on creating more affordable housing and strengthening the safety net to prevent homelessness. Federal assistance that was previously available to fill some of those gaps—through the Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-housing Program (HPRP)—has been depleted and not replaced. Still, rapid re-housing works: communities have been able to decrease the amount of time households spend homeless and increase the number of households they serve.

Federal investment in rapid re-housing is increasing, but it is still not sufficient to address all of the need. During Fiscal Year 2013, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs made \$300 million available for community-based grants for homelessness prevention and rapid re-housing through the Supportive Services for Veterans Families (SSVF) program. The Administration also published a memo to states urging them to consider using Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) assistance to help families gain and maintain housing stability. The new Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG) program does provide flexible resources for communities to rapidly re-house households, but it has not been fully funded.

Finally, efforts to improve data quality and ongoing assessment of need and planning for interventions need to continue. Efforts include developing consistent and better methodologies for conducting the annual point-in-time counts of homeless persons. In addition, the HUD requirement that youth be included in the point-in-time counts will provide much needed information on an overlooked homeless subpopulation and provide a more comprehensive view of homelessness in the United States.