

Report on Homelessness in North Dakota 2008



**North Dakota Coalition for Homeless People
Statewide Point-in-Time Survey and Study of Homelessness
January 30, 2008**



Acknowledgements

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Definition of Terms

To assist our readers, definitions are provided for the following terms used throughout this report:

Literally Homeless - People who stay in emergency shelters or transitional housing. This category also includes unsheltered homeless people who sleep in places not meant for human habitation (for example: street, parks, abandoned buildings, dumpsters, subway tunnels) and who may also use shelters on an intermittent basis.
Precariously-Housed - People who are at imminent risk of becoming literally homeless at any time. They may be temporarily doubled up with friends or relatives, or staying in a motel when they accumulate enough money for a room.
Overall Homeless ó In this report the overall homeless population includes both the literally homeless and the precariously housed.
Chronically Homeless - An unaccompanied homeless individual with a disabling condition who has either been continuously homeless for a year or more, or who has experienced at least four episodes of homelessness within the past three years. To be considered chronically homeless, person must have been sleeping in a place not meant for human habitation and /or in emergency shelter during that time.
Long-Term Homeless ó Includes chronically homeless individuals and also includes families that have been homeless (lacking a permanent place to live) for a year or more, or has had four or more episodes of homelessness in the last three years. In addition, the person or family member has a disabling condition which limits their activities of daily living. This group does not exclude families who are temporarily living doubled up and not in a position to contribute to the household.

Data Collection

The 2008 Point-in-Time Survey was distributed to 261 organizations including emergency shelter providers, transitional housing providers, social services agencies, community action agencies, human service centers, housing authorities, healthcare providers, emergency food pantries, soup kitchens, faith-based organizations, and law enforcement agencies.

Data Preparation, Analysis, and Report Production

This report was produced in collaboration with the talented staff of:

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Executive Summary

The North Dakota Coalition for Homeless People presents this 2008 Report on Homelessness in North Dakota. The purpose of the report is to increase understanding about homelessness in our communities, and to advance efforts that will ultimately end the housing crisis that daily impacts more than 600 homeless men, women, and children in North Dakota. Key findings are derived from a statewide point-in-time survey of homeless people that has been conducted annually for several years by trained surveyors.

This study begins with a look at the demographics and characteristics of people who are literally homeless. Their homelessness is the result of a lack of resources, bad choices, and/or misfortunes. The numbers of people who are literally homeless in North Dakota seem low when compared to other places. However, our shelters are continuously over crowded and the people seeking housing and services are becoming increasingly difficult to serve. While 5,000 North Dakotans are estimated to experience homelessness at least once over the course of a year, homelessness is mostly hidden in our communities. Perhaps only shelter providers and the homeless people they serve fully understand that homelessness is a real fact of life in our communities.

In addition to the homeless in the shelter system, this study includes information gathered from more than 200 respondents who are precariously housed, without a permanent residence, temporarily doubled up with family or friends, or living in motels for as long as they can pay for a room. In this situation, they are in serious risk of being added to those who are in shelters or on the streets. This group identified themselves as homeless because they did not have a permanent home of their own. This is a side of homelessness that is quite common in our communities, but often ignored. It is almost impossible to get an accurate count of this group. It is particularly characteristic of homeless youth referred to as "couch surfers." It is also characteristic of homelessness on North Dakota reservations. Most often, people in these circumstances do not receive the services they need to regain self-sufficiency.

While for most people the duration of homelessness is short, too many North Dakotans are homeless for long periods of time. Addictions and mental illness, histories of criminal backgrounds and bad credit, and mistrust of the system contribute to repeated and longer episodes of homelessness. This study includes a section that looks at the characteristics and needs of individuals who are identified as the long-term homeless.

Finally, the study analyzes North Dakota's homeless population by region. The characteristics of the homeless population differ from one community to the next. For this reason this report provides information that pertains to eight separate regional areas.

The North Dakota Coalition for Homeless People supports the direction that North Dakota communities are taking to alleviate homelessness. In 2007, several North Dakota communities declared "its time to stop counting and start taking action." Public officials and non-profit agencies in major cities and reservations of North Dakota formed planning groups committed to a common goal - ending long-term homelessness over the next 10 years. The traditional system that serves the homeless, while successful for many homeless individuals and families has limitations and does not meet the needs of today. The evidence of this is seen in our overcrowded shelters and in the numbers of long-term homeless. The common goal of ending long-term homelessness brings public officials, service providers, housing providers, businesses, law enforcement, and other stakeholders together to utilize their strengths as a community to effectively provide lasting solutions through permanent supportive housing, and divert individuals and families from long-term homelessness.