Guest Editor's Introduction

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This issue of *Cityscape* focuses on homelessness, a complex social issue that affects many people in America. According to *The 2009 Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress*, on a single night in January 2009, there were an estimated 643,067 sheltered and unsheltered homeless people nationwide (HUD, 2010). Numerous research studies have indicated that the vast majority of people who use shelter do so for only a short period of time and quickly exit the homeless assistance system; therefore, exponentially more people experience homelessness over the course of a full year. In 2009, nearly 1.56 million people used an emergency shelter or a transitional housing program for at least one night. When combined with the total number of unsheltered homeless people (who are not captured in the aforementioned 1.56 million figure), experts estimate that up to 1 percent of the U.S. population will experience at least one night of homelessness in a given year. This number increases dramatically, up to roughly 10 percent, when considering the prevalence of homelessness among just the population of Americans living in poverty. Although circumstances vary, homelessness affects each one of us, regardless of economic status, racial background, or cultural identity.

Homelessness has been an enduring feature of American history, but over the past 30 years, homelessness as a social policy issue has exploded, demanding the attention of policymakers and researchers alike. (See Leginski, 2007, for an excellent summary of the "waves" of homelessness across American history.) In 1987, Congress passed the McKinney-Vento Homelessness Assistance Act, marking the first wave of federal fiscal assistance directed to addressing what was thought to be, at the time, a temporary social crisis. As the original law was amended, and more and more federal resources flowed to local communities to establish emergency shelters, transitional housing programs, and a range of social services, a body of evidence began to grow positing multiple, and often conflicting, theories to explain the ever-growing tide of individuals, and for the first time in history, substantial numbers of families with children, flowing into America's newly developed homeless assistance system. More recently, the body of evidence has grown more refined, with more accurate population counts and demographic data available through the increasing coverage and quality of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD's) Homeless Management Information Systems (HMIS) data. This increasing body of evidence has yielded proven interventions to end homelessness for specific subpopulations, such as chronically homeless individuals. These recent milestones have led to demonstrable successes, such as a decrease in the number of people experiencing chronic homelessness; however, the overall number of Americans experiencing homelessness continues to grow each year, with recent spikes in the

number of homeless families experiencing homelessness. It is clear that, although the growing body of research on homelessness has been instrumental in advancing the goal of ending homelessness altogether, much work remains.

The articles featured in the Symposium of this issue of *Cityscape* present the research and writing of selected scholars, whose work was supported by HUD through the Office of University Partnerships' Doctoral Dissertation Research Grant (DDRG) program. The DDRG program has enabled doctoral students to cultivate their research skills through the preparation of dissertations and the opportunity to present and publish their work. By offering support to promising researchers during the doctoral process, HUD has encouraged scholars to focus on research in the areas that are relevant to HUD's mission.

The DDRG program has provided scholars with resources that enable them to establish strong research foundations on which they can pursue research agendas. From 2003 to 2010, 100 students from various institutions received awards. Expert researchers selected the award recipients.

The DDRG program has produced a cadre of professionals in urban research and policy. In this issue of *Cityscape*, we have listed the recipients of DDRG awards from 1994 to 2010. For people who work in housing and urban development, the list will speak for itself.

DDRG recipients are senior associates, senior policy analysts, professors, presidents, chief executive officers, and people who serve on the boards of national housing advocacy organizations. Some are recognized experts in planning and finance, and others have been invited to testify before Congress on subjects pertaining to their expertise.

The Symposium in this issue of *Cityscape* resulted from a call that I circulated among DDRG recipients awarded between 2004 through 2010 for abstracts based on their supported dissertations. More than 35 scholars responded. Looking for common themes, I found a strong interest in the causes and cures for homelessness. Research on homelessness by DDRG recipients has highlighted this issue from unusual angles on the nation's efforts to address the problem. The process of discovery that results from talented new scholars armed with the tools of their respective disciplines may help the United States make progress against it. I am very grateful for the assistance of Anne Fletcher and Pam Blumenthal, whose quality assurance reviews resulted in many improvements to the final articles.

Articles in this Symposium

The Symposium in this issue of *Cityscape* highlights several articles that provide a snapshot of homelessness in America and represent outstanding HUD-sponsored research: (1) A Cross-Level Analysis of the Relationship Between Organizational Culture and Technology Use Among Homeless Service Providers; (2) From Exclusion to Destitution: Race, Affordable Housing, and Homelessness; and (3) From Street Life to Housing: Consumer and Provider Perspectives on Service Delivery and Access to Housing.

"A Cross-Level Analysis of the Relationship Between Organizational Culture and Technology Use Among Homeless Service Providers," by Courtney Cronley of Rutgers University, explores how homeless service providers are implementing Homeless Management Information Systems using an integrated theory base of innovation diffusion, sociotechnical systems, and organizational culture.

The results of this research suggest that technology dissemination among homeless service providers may face challenges due to organizational culture. The homeless service providers surveyed showed high levels of organizational resistance to change. Thus, educating leadership about the utility and ease of use of new technologies, such as an information management system, is critical to successful implementation of HMIS.

The study also showed that the homeless service providers who were sampled scored high on measures of organizational proficiency—meaning that leadership and staff members value competency and offering optimal services. Thus, successful implementation is contingent on more than just startup and short-term support funding. The results of the research contributed to a restructuring of HMIS implementation efforts within the Knoxville/Knox County Homeless Continuum of Care. The organizational culture findings showed a definite organizational preference for clear HMIS policies integrated into the current workflow. An HMIS staff member worked individually with each organization to understand the work system and create unique, standardized HMIS procedures for each entity. In addition, organizational analysis results revealed that homeless service providers in Knoxville scored high on proficiency. Consequently, HMIS staff members started to emphasize technology training and offered more frequent and individualized training on site, rather than requiring service provider staff to come to the HMIS offices.

"From Exclusion to Destitution: Race, Affordable Housing, and Homelessness," by George Carter III of the U.S. Census Bureau, examines the overrepresentation of African Americans in the homeless population. African Americans comprise 13 percent of the U.S. population but account for approximately 40 percent of the homeless population. Little research exists to explain why this overrepresentation exists. This article examines housed and homeless populations separately and analyzes the role of residential segregation, affordable housing, and access to homeless services in the overrepresentation.

The first part of the research focuses on the segment of the housed population most at risk of becoming homeless—those living in inadequate and overcrowded housing. It tests the relationship between residential segregation, affordable housing supply, and the extent to which African Americans live in inadequate or overcrowded housing. The author finds that high rates of racial segregation increase housing inadequacy and crowding in households with African-American members. He also finds that lower supplies of affordable housing increased housing inadequacy and crowding.

The second part of the research examines racial differences in migration for homeless services. Previous research found that shelters are more likely to be placed in communities with high minority populations. The author notes that not only do homeless African Americans have greater access to shelter space, but that they are less likely than Whites to migrate to

use homeless services. The author concludes that his findings stress the importance of fair housing enforcement, policies that promote the construction of housing affordable to low-income populations, and policies that increase access to homeless services for underserved populations. In addition, he concludes that the service-based approach to measuring the homeless may be partially responsible for the overrepresentation of African Americans in the homeless population. If White homeless people have a difficult time finding homeless services, they will be less likely to use them and will not appear in client data collected by service providers. In contrast, African-American homeless people have greater access to homeless services and are more likely to use them and to be counted as homeless.

"From Street Life to Housing: Consumer and Provider Perspectives on Service Delivery and Access to Housing," by Tatjana Meschede of Brandeis University, is a qualitative study that demonstrates the achievements and failures of services attempting to reach those most likely to be left out of the homeless service delivery model—the chronically homeless street population. Her study investigates the bridges and barriers to housing for 174 chronically homeless street dwellers in urban Boston and examines whether the services provided by public shelters, healthcare professionals, detoxification centers, and substance-abuse programs actually help homeless individuals move off the street and into some kind of permanent housing situation. This study addresses important differences between providers' and consumers' perceptions and theories on homelessness, service needs of homeless street dwellers, and service provision. The author concludes that a Housing First model may be a better approach for these homeless individuals than the traditional continuum of care model that provides services but not housing. She emphasizes the importance of looking at homelessness as a housing problem and to begin by housing the homeless, then provide the supportive services they need to adjust to life off the streets.

Beginning with this issue, *Cityscape* will also present brief reactions to the Symposium articles from distinguished foreign scholars who have examined similar issues in their own countries. America's issues are not unique to these shores, and we may have much to learn from the policies of other nations. We are fortunate to begin this process with Julie Christian of the University of Birmingham and Suzanne Fitzpatrick of Heriot-Watt University in the United Kingdom.

Conclusion

Most people in the metropolitan areas of the United States see the faces of homeless people often. Homelessness affects all of us, both directly and indirectly. Although any individual program may have controversies, federal funding to end homelessness is not controversial. Both U.S. political parties favor public action to eliminate homelessness, but homelessness continues. We need to know why. We need to know more than we do. No one should be homeless. It is my hope that the Symposium in this issue of *Cityscape* will bring attention to and foster greater awareness of the growing issue of homelessness.

References

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