HOMELESSNESS:

Programs and the People They Serve

Findings of the National Survey of Homeless Assistance Providers and Clients

Technical Report

Interagency Council on the Homeless

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Prepared for:
Interagency Council on the Homeless

Prepared by:
The Urban Institute
Martha R. Burt
Laudan Y. Aron
Toby Douglas
Jesse Valente
Edgar Lee
Britta Iwen

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PREFACE

1996 NATIONAL SURVEY OF HOMELESS ASSISTANCE PROVIDERS AND CLIENTS

The **1996 National Survey of Homeless Assistance Providers and Clients** is a landmark study. It was designed to provide updated information about the providers of homeless assistance and the characteristics of homeless persons who use services. The survey is based on a statistical sample of 76 metropolitan and nonmetropolitan areas, including small cities and rural areas. Data for the survey were collected between October 1995 and November 1996.

The survey is a response to the fact that homelessness remains one of America's most important social issues. Chronic poverty, coupled with physical and other disabilities, have combined with rapid changes in society, the workplace, and local housing markets to make many people vulnerable to its effects. With the enactment of the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act of 1987, Congress recognized the need to supplement "mainstream" federally funded housing and human services programs with funding that was specifically targeted to assist homeless people. Over $11 billion in McKinney funds have been appropriated since then, and billions more have been provided through other federal, state, and local programs and benefits.

Those who provide assistance—the government agencies, the thousands of non-profit organizations, and countless private individuals—have learned a great deal about effective ways to meet the needs of homeless people through improved supportive services, increased housing options and cooperative ventures among agencies providing assistance. Although substantial progress has been made in obtaining funding and learning about effective approaches, much more remains to be done.

Despite significant increases in funding, program administrators had to manage their programs without current and reliable data on the characteristics of the people they were serving and the newly emerging networks of services and service providers. Indeed, the last national study was conducted by the Urban Institute in 1987. In 1991 Federal agencies began initial planning for a new national survey to fill this gap.

The new survey was designed and funded by 12 federal agencies[1] in a collaborative venture under the auspices of the Interagency Council on the Homeless, a working group of the White House Domestic Policy Council. The U.S. Bureau of the Census collected the data, and the Urban Institute analyzed it. A panel comprised of public interest groups, nationally recognized researchers, and other experts on issues related to homelessness reviewed and commented on the

[1]The 12 Federal agency sponsors include the Departments of Housing and Urban Development, Health and Human Services, Veterans Affairs, Agriculture, Commerce, Education, Energy, Justice, Labor, and Transportation as well as the Social Security Administration and the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

analysis plan and draft reports. All of the draft survey instruments were published in the Federal Register for public review and comment.

It is important to note that the survey was *not* designed to produce a national count of the number of homeless people, nor does it include information on client characteristics at the regional or local levels. The survey *was* designed to provide up-to-date information about the providers of assistance to homeless people, the characteristics of those who use services that focus on homeless people, and how this population has changed in metropolitan areas since 1987. The analyses of the provider data examine factors such as geographic level (e.g., national, central city, communities outside of central cities but still within metropolitan statistical areas, and rural areas), program type, and the types and levels of services delivered. The data received from service users identifies patterns based on a number of characteristics including, but not limited to, such factors as age, race/ethnicity, sex, family status, history of homelessness, employment, education, veteran status, and use of services and benefits.

The information in this report is critical to discussions about effective public policy responses needed to break the cycle of homelessness. It encompasses a wealth of data that weaves a unique snapshot of homelessness in the United States.

As such, it provides an important baseline and foundation for future assessments of the nature and extent of homelessness. It also provides a valuable overview that will improve our understanding of the characteristics of homeless people who use services, the nature of homelessness, and how best to address it.[2]

[2] Two other items related to the survey are currently available. ***Lists*** containing the names, addresses and telephone numbers of the homeless assistance providers in each of the 76 survey areas who reported in 1996 that they met the criteria for inclusion in the survey are available from the Interagency Council on the Homeless, HUD, 451 7th Street, S.W., Washington, DC 20410, Room 7274, or survey_results@hud.gov. ***Public Use Data Files*** and all relevant documentation are available through two sources. You may download the files at no charge from www.census.gov, select "Subjects A to Z,"and then select "N" for "NSHAPC." (Copies of the Summary and Technical Reports will also be found at this website.) Alternatively, you may purchase the data files on CD by calling Census Bureau Customer Service at 301-457-4100.

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