

July 2009

The 2008 Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress: A Summary of Findings



U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
Office of Community Planning and Development



2008 AHAR: Key Findings at a Glance

- About 664,000 people nationwide were homeless—either sheltered or unsheltered—on a single night in January 2008, down about 7,500 people (or one percent) from the previous year.
- The number of people using homeless residential programs during the course of the year remained steady. Between October 1, 2007 and September 30, 2008, approximately 1.6 million homeless people used shelters or transitional housing programs at least once.
- While the number of homeless *individuals* in shelters was about the same as last year, the number of *people in families* increased by nine percent to 516,700, suggesting that family homelessness may be on the rise.
- Homeless persons in shelters and on the street continued to be most heavily concentrated in urban areas. One in five people homeless on a single night in January were located in Los Angeles, New York, and Detroit.
- However, in the twelve months ending on September 30, 2008, the share of the sheltered homeless populations in suburban and rural areas increased substantially, from 23 percent in 2007 to 32 percent in 2008.
- There were early signs that the economic crisis may have affected trends in homelessness nationally. Notably, a greater share of people accessing the homeless system in 2008 came from stays with friends and family and from places where they had lived a year or more, suggesting that people who had been stably housed were becoming homeless after exhausting their housing options.

*See Glossary of key terms on the last page of this brochure.
To read the full 2008 AHAR, visit www.hudhre.info and www.bmis.info*



About the 2008 AHAR

The 2008 Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) is the fourth in a series of reports prepared by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to help policymakers and planners respond to the needs of the nation's homeless population. The 2008 AHAR paints a complete picture of homelessness – including counts of individuals, persons in families, and special population groups such as veterans and those experiencing chronic homelessness. It provides data on how people use different types of shelters, where they were just before entering these residential programs, and how much time they spent in shelters over the course of the year.

This report breaks new ground as the first one to provide year-to-year trend information on homelessness nationwide. It is also the first to compare one-night Point-in-Time (PIT) counts over several years. Such comparative information is useful in identifying how the composition of the homeless population may be changing over time and in determining whether the nation's policy responses are proving effective in preventing and ending homelessness.

The data collection period for the 2008 AHAR ended on September 30, 2008, just as the economic crisis was accelerating. As a result, the report can offer only preliminary indicators of how the crisis may be changing the face of homelessness in the United States. While these early numbers do not suggest a surge in homelessness, they are consistent with early warning signs that point to increasing housing instability, which is highlighted throughout the summary.

Sources of Data

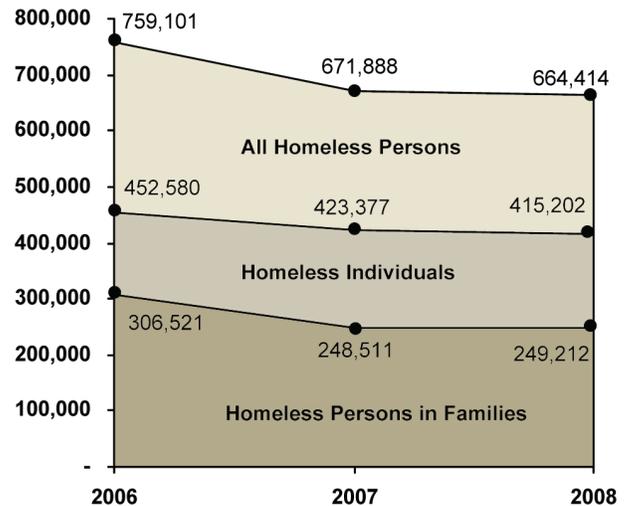
The 2008 AHAR is based on information from two different sources. **Point-in-Time (PIT)** estimates refer to counts of both sheltered and unsheltered homeless people taken on a single night during the last week in January. The most recent PIT counts were conducted nationally in January 2008. The 2008 AHAR also compares PIT data from January 2008 with those collected in January 2006 and 2007.

The other source of data is the **Homeless Management Information System (HMIS)**, which are electronic administrative databases that record and store information on the characteristics and service use patterns of sheltered homeless persons over time. The 2008 AHAR uses HMIS data for the 12-month period from October 1, 2007 through September 30, 2008 to count and describe people who used shelters during this time period. The 2008 AHAR compares this information to the previous 12-month period.

Overall Homelessness Held Steady, But Use of Shelters by Families and Outside of Cities Grew

Both Point-in-Time (PIT) estimates reported by communities throughout the United States and national HMIS estimates show that homelessness has held steady since 2007. Based on the single-night PIT count taken in January 2008, there were roughly 664,000 sheltered and unsheltered homeless people nationwide, down by about one percent or 7,500 people from last year. Also, according to HMIS data, a total of 1.6 million people used a homeless residential program (emergency shelters or transitional housing) during the one-year period that ended September 30, 2008, about the same as last year's estimate.

Trends in Single-Night Counts of Homeless Individuals and Persons in Families, 2006 –2008



There were, however, two notable increases – in the number of homeless families and in homelessness in suburban and rural areas. These findings and others are addressed more fully in the sections that follow.

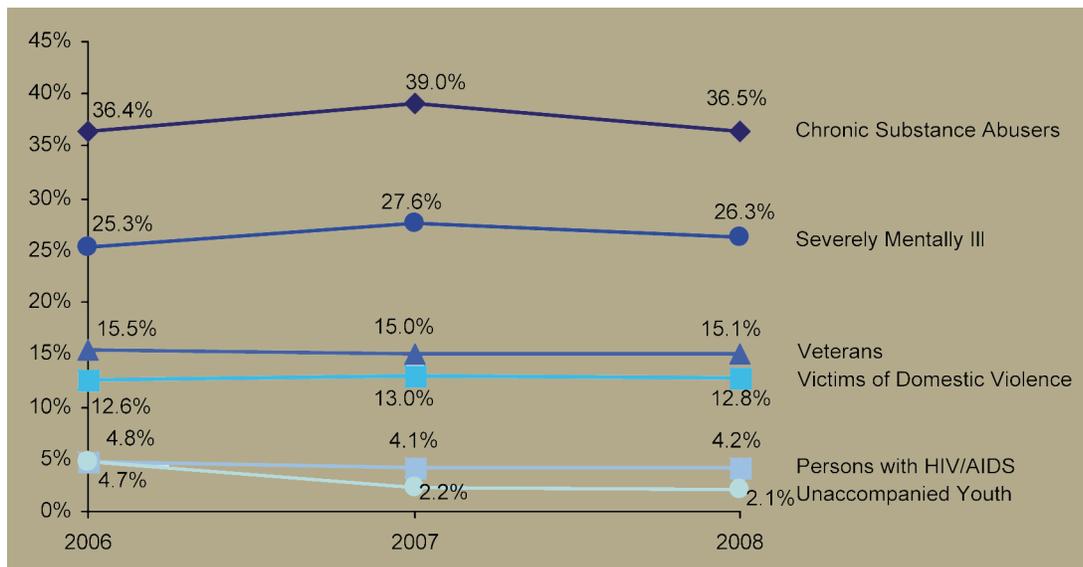
Profile of Homelessness in 2008

- Most of the people who stayed in emergency shelters and transitional housing in 2008 were individual men over the age of 30 and members of a minority group.
- However, sizable segments of the homeless population do not fit this profile. Nearly 40 percent of the people who used homeless residential programs in 2008 were white, non-Hispanic; 20 percent were children; and 33 percent were homeless together with at least one other person.
- There was substantial growth in the number of homeless families in 2008. While the total number of sheltered homeless people remained essentially unchanged between 2007 and 2008, the number of homeless people in families grew by nine percent, from about 473,000 to 517,000. In 2008, people in families represented 32 percent of the total sheltered homeless population, up from 29 percent in 2007.

Family homelessness increased by nine percent between 2007 and 2008.

- There was also an increase in the number of white, non-Hispanic people who used emergency shelters or transitional housing. The percentage of sheltered homeless people who were white and not Hispanic increased by 4 percentage points for individuals and 3.1 percentage points for families.
- On a single night in January 2008, approximately 124,000 people were counted as experiencing chronic homelessness, representing about 19 percent of the total homeless population—both sheltered and unsheltered—counted on that night. The number of chronically homeless people was essentially level with the count taken in 2007.
- For specific sheltered subpopulations, including veterans, people suffering from severe mental illness, and victims of domestic violence, the counts held mostly steady from 2007 to 2008.

Point-in-Time Counts of Homeless Subpopulations, January 2006-January 2008



Source: 2006 through 2008 Continuum of Care Application: Exhibit 1, CoC Point-in-Time Homeless Population and Subpopulations Charts.

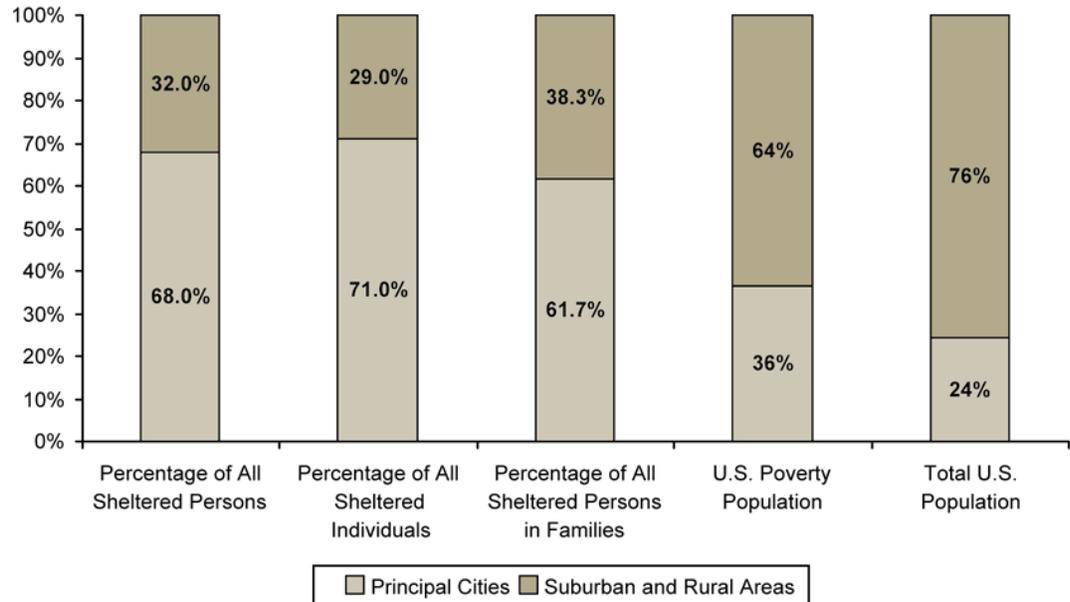


Geography of Homelessness

- Homelessness continued to be primarily an urban phenomenon. In 2008, about one in every 66 people living in U.S. principal cities used a residential homeless program, compared to one in every 450 people living in suburban or rural areas.
- However, sheltered homelessness increased sharply in suburban and rural areas between 2007 and 2008. The share of individuals and families using homeless residential programs in suburban or rural areas grew by nine percent, from 23 percent in 2007 to 32 percent in 2008.
- The increase reflected a greater use of existing residential facilities in suburban and rural areas rather than an expansion or development of new facilities. For example, between 2007 and 2008, occupancy rates in transitional housing programs in suburban and rural areas increased by 10 percent.

Suburban and rural homelessness is on the rise.

Geographic Distribution of the Sheltered Homeless Population by Household Type, 2008



Sources: Homeless Management Information System data, 2008

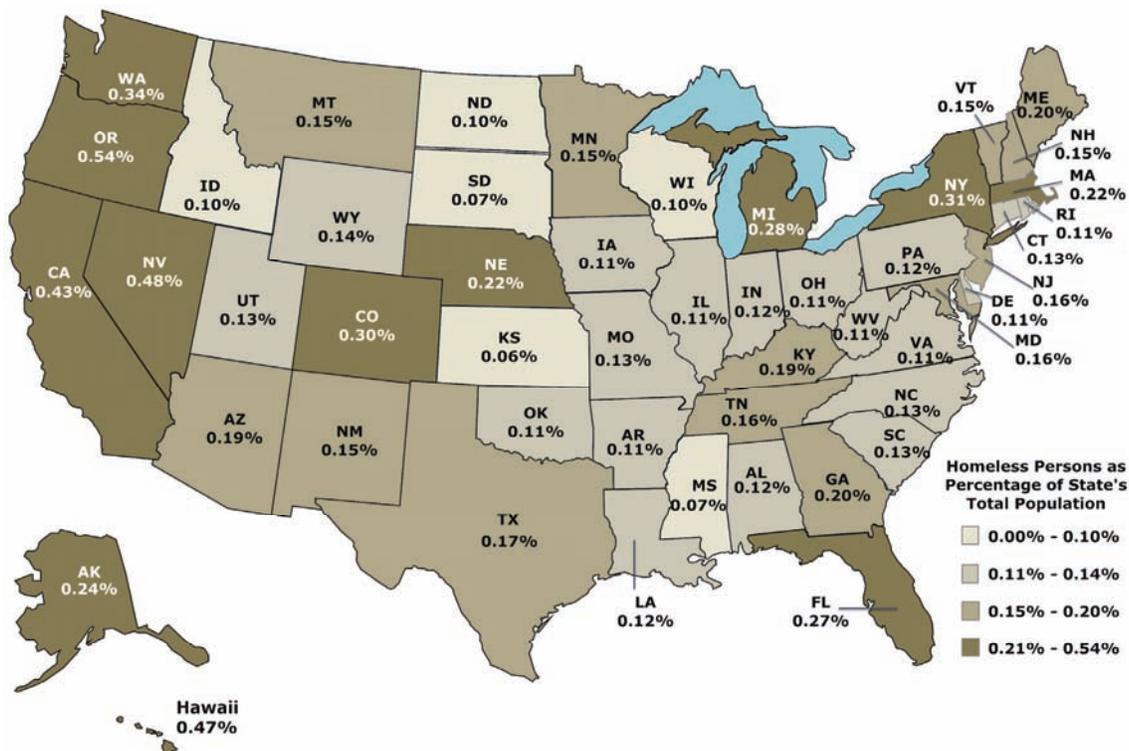
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State and Local Trends

- The number of homeless people varied considerably across states, but some states had especially large numbers of homeless people relative to their populations. On a single night in January 2008, the highest concentrations of homeless people were found in Oregon, Nevada, Hawaii, and California.
- On a single night in January 2008, more than half of all homeless people were found in just five states: California, New York, Florida, Texas, and Michigan. In addition, one in five homeless people were found in just three cities: Los Angeles, New York City, and Detroit.
- Between 2007 and 2008, a number of states experienced sizable reductions in their homeless populations, including West Virginia, Idaho, Arkansas, Arizona, Tennessee, and Virginia.
- For the same period, several rural states, among them Mississippi, Wyoming, Montana, Missouri, and Iowa, experienced large increases in their homeless populations.

More than half of all homeless people in January 2008 were found in just five states.

Estimate of Homeless Persons as a Percent of State's Total Population, 2008



Sources: 2008 Continuum of Care Applications: Exhibit 1, CoC Point-in-Time Homeless Population and Subpopulations Chart; 2007 American Community Survey

Movement into the Homeless System

- Among all homeless people, the share who reported that they were already homeless at the time they entered a shelter or transitional housing program dropped from 42 percent in 2007 to 37 percent in 2008.
- At the same time, the number of all homeless people who entered a residential program directly from a “housed” situation—living in their own housing or staying with family or friends—rose from 26 percent in 2007 to 29 percent in 2008.
- Families were much more likely than individuals to be housed the night before becoming homeless. Nearly 62 percent of persons in families came from a “housed” situation, mostly staying with family or friends, compared to 37 percent of individuals. In addition, families were far less likely than individuals to come from institutional settings such as hospitals, treatment centers, jails, and foster homes.
- The increase between 2007 and 2008 in the percent of families who entered emergency shelters or transitional housing after staying with family or friends may reflect the worsening economic situation, as families lost their ability to maintain their housing and became homeless after having exhausted short-term alternatives.
- Another change from 2007 was that a larger percentage of sheltered homeless people had stable accommodations prior to entering emergency shelter or transitional housing; that is, they had spent a year or more in the place they were the night before becoming homeless. This may suggest that a growing number of people who had been stably housed are entering or re-entering the shelter system.

In 2008 more people were staying with family and friends or were stably housed prior to entering the homeless system than in 2007.

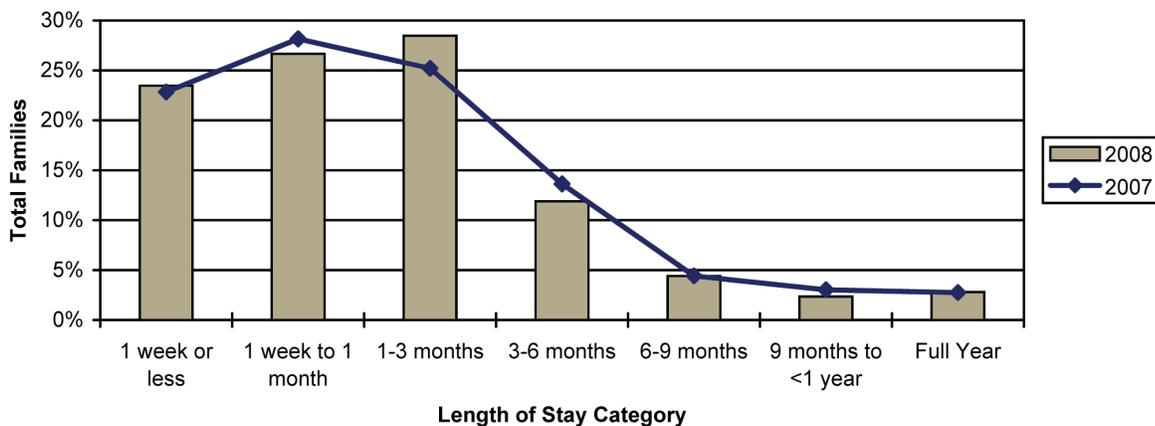
Previous Living Situation of People Using Homeless Residential Services, 2008			
Living Arrangement the Night before Program Entry	Percentage of All Adults	Percentage of Individual Adults	Percentage of Adults in Families
Total Already Homeless	37.2%	39.4%	25.9%
Total from “Housing”	40.9%	37.0%	61.5%
Total from Institutional Settings	11.8%	13.6%	2.4%
Total from Other Situations	10.1%	10.0%	10.2%
Number of Homeless Adults	1,283,272	1,092,612	203,199

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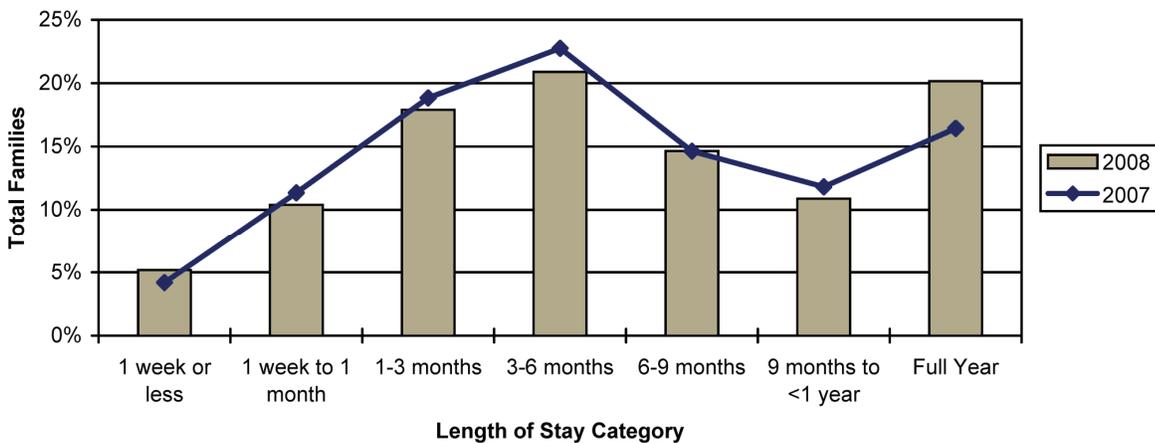
Length of Stay in Emergency Shelter and Transitional Housing

- In 2008, the average length of stay in emergency shelters was 21 nights, with about 60 percent of users staying less than a month and 33 percent staying less than a week. By contrast, the average length of stay in transitional housing was 130 nights, with about 40 percent of users staying six months or more and nearly 18 percent staying for at least a year.
- Homeless families tended to stay in residential programs longer than individuals – an average of 12 days longer in emergency shelter and 54 days longer in transitional housing.
- Lengths of stay in both emergency shelters and transitional housing increased between 2007 and 2008. The average length of stay in transitional housing increased by 16 days for individuals and by 10 days for persons in families. The average length of stay in emergency shelters also increased for individuals (+ four nights) but did not change for families.

Lengths of Stay in Emergency Shelter for Families in 2008 Compared with 2007



Lengths of Stay in Transitional Housing for Families in 2008 Compared with 2007



Source: Homeless Management Information System data, 2007-2008

Looking Ahead

- The 2009 AHAR will continue to provide Congress and the nation with updated counts of homelessness nationwide, including counts of individuals, people in families, and special population groups such as chronically homeless people and people with disabilities.
- These updates will be based on PIT counts conducted in January 2009 and HMIS data collected during the 12-months from October 1, 2008 through September 30, 2009. The 2009 AHAR will also compare trends in HMIS and PIT data over three years, 2007-2009.
- Given the timing of the HMIS data, we anticipate the 2009 AHAR will be able to provide more insight into the effects of the financial crisis on homelessness.
- The report will also feature a special chapter on homeless veterans, coming at a time when many service men and women are returning from active duty in Iraq and deployment to Afghanistan.
- Another special feature of the 2009 AHAR will focus on HUD's efforts to prevent homelessness and re-house homeless people through the Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing Program (HPRP). As part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, Congress allocated \$1.5 billion for a Homelessness Prevention Fund, which supports HPRP.
- Using data from an ever-expanding group of communities that participate in the AHAR, HUD continues to view the report as the primary resource for up-to-date information about homelessness.



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Glossary of Terms

Continuums of Care (CoC) are local planning bodies responsible for coordinating the full range of homelessness services in a geographic area, which may cover a city, county, metropolitan area, or even an entire state.

Chronic Homelessness refers to an unaccompanied individual with a disability who has either been continuously homeless for a year or more or has experienced at least four episodes of homelessness in the last three years. To be considered chronically homeless, a person must have been in emergency shelters or on the streets during these periods.

Emergency Shelter is any facility whose primary purpose is to provide temporary shelter for homeless persons.

Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) is a software application designed to record and store client-level information on the characteristics and service needs of homeless persons.

Individual refers to sheltered homeless individuals, including single adults, unaccompanied youth, persons in multiple-adult households, and persons in multiple-child households.

Persons in Families refers to persons in households with at least one adult and one child.

Point-in-Time (PIT) Counts offer a snapshot of homelessness – of both sheltered and unsheltered homeless populations – on a single night. The one-night counts are conducted in January and also provide a single-night estimate of the number of homeless persons within particular subpopulations, such as veterans, severely mentally ill, substance abusers, etc.

Principal City replaces the term “central city” for the largest city in each metropolitan or micropolitan statistical area.

Sheltered Homeless Persons are individuals who live in emergency shelters or transitional housing programs.

Transitional Housing Program is a type of supportive housing where homeless persons may stay and receive support services for up to 24 months, and which are designed to enable them to move into permanent housing.

Unsheltered Homeless Persons include people who live in places not meant for human habitation, such as the streets, abandoned buildings, vehicles, parks, and train stations.



