

Homeless in Minnesota 2006: At a glance

Highlights from the statewide survey

Wilder Research

At least 9,200 people are homeless in Minnesota each night. This is similar to or a slight decline from 2003.



About the study

Since 1991, Wilder has conducted a statewide homelessness survey every three years to better understand the causes, circumstances and effects of homelessness, and to promote efforts toward permanent, affordable housing for all Minnesotans.

The October 2006 survey is the most comprehensive to date. More than 950 volunteers around the state conducted face-to-face interviews with some 2,500 people in emergency shelters, transitional housing programs, and battered women's shelters. In addition, thanks to extraordinary outreach efforts by our partners, nearly 1,200 homeless people not in shelters were interviewed.

Key findings

Overall distress is on the rise

A troubling finding is the increase in overall distress including mental illness, substance abuse, traumatic brain injury, and other disabilities among homeless people.

Most notable is the increase in the percentage of people with serious mental health disorders, which has climbed steadily for the past 12 years. For the first time in 2006, over half of homeless adults and youth (age 17 and younger) reported a serious mental illness.

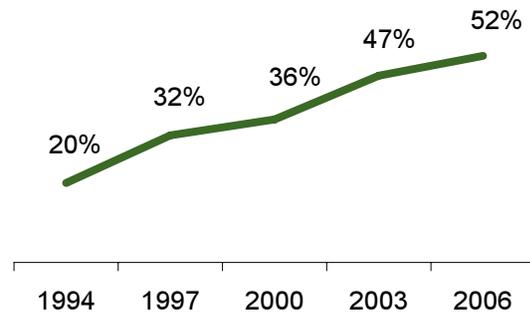
In the past two years, 36 percent of homeless adults received outpatient care because of nervousness, depression, or mental health problems, and 10 percent had been in a residential mental health treatment facility.

What do we mean by “homeless”?

Any adult whose primary nighttime residence is a supervised, publicly- or privately-operated temporary living accommodation, including emergency shelters, transitional housing, and battered women’s shelters; or whose nighttime residence is not meant for human habitation, such as under bridges or in cars. This is based on a definition by the U.S. Congress.

By law, this definition is expanded for youth age 17 or younger to include those who stay temporarily in other people’s homes, with or without their parents, because they have nowhere else to live.

STEADY RISE IN PROPORTION OF HOMELESS ADULTS WITH SERIOUS MENTAL ILLNESS



Besides mental illness, homeless people also have high incidence of chronic medical conditions, head injuries, alcoholism and drug abuse disorders, and cognitive disabilities. They reported high needs for basic health care, mental health treatment, prescription medicines, and substance abuse treatment.

Fewer newcomers to Minnesota

About 77 percent of homeless people had lived in Minnesota two years or more, up from 61 percent in 1994. Slightly over two-thirds (69%) had lived here more than five years. Three out of five homeless adults (59%) had lived in Minnesota for more than 10 years. Of those in Minnesota for two years or less, one-third (33%) had lived in Minnesota before.

Racial disparities persist

Black, American Indian and Hispanic people continued to make up the majority (54%) of the adult homeless population, while they make up fewer than 10 percent of the overall Minnesota adult population. These disparities are similar to 2003 but have decreased since 2000 when 61 percent of the homeless adult population was Black, American Indian and Hispanic.

About two-thirds of unaccompanied homeless youth age 17 and younger were Black, American Indian, Hispanic, Asian, or of mixed race, compared to just 18 percent of all Minnesota youth. In the metro area, 80 percent were homeless youth of color; in greater Minnesota, youth of color were 53 percent of homeless youth age 17 and younger.

Increase in the number of ex-offenders

The number of ex-offenders among the homeless has seen a steady increase since 1997. In 2006, 47 percent of all homeless adults had ever been incarcerated, up from 42 percent in 2003, and 27 to 28 percent from 1991 through 1997.

More youth are homeless and not in shelters

Results from the outreach portion of the study, coupled with the number of youth who reported they were turned away from shelters, suggests more youth are on the street, at least part of the time, than in 2003.

Transitional housing use has declined

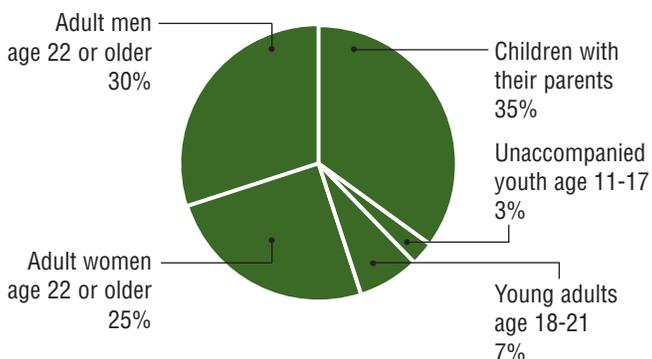
In 2006 3,756 people stayed in transitional housing the night of the study, 20 percent fewer than in 2003. Transitional housing is time-limited subsidized housing intended to move people to self-sufficiency. The drop may be related to the increase in permanent supportive housing, which is not time-limited.

Veterans from today's military conflicts are showing up in shelters and on the streets

Veterans, including a small number with recent service in Iraq and Afghanistan, continue to make up about one-quarter of the homeless adult male population. While just 17 Iraq and Afghanistan veterans were identified in the 2006 study, this group was twice as likely as other veterans to report post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Who are the homeless?

Of the total estimated 9,200 homeless people in Minnesota, on the date of the survey, 6,292 people were staying in shelters. Of those living in unsheltered locations, we identified another 1,421 through outreach. Children, youth, and young adults make up nearly half of people who are homeless.



Age

The average age of homeless adults (18 and older) was 41 for men and 33 for women. Most children who were homeless and with their parents were age 12 or younger (84%), and about half (49%) were age 5 or younger.

Families

In 2006, Minnesota's homeless population included 1,318 families (defined as one or more parents or caregivers with one or more children). Seventy-five percent of children were with just their mother or other female caregiver, 22 percent were with both parents or two caregivers, and 4 percent were with just their father or male caregiver.

Between 1991 and 2006, the number of homeless families more than tripled, from 434 families in 1991 to a peak of 1,413 in 2000 before it leveled off to its current 1,318 families.

Education among homeless adults

- 26% had no high school diploma
- 47% had a high school diploma or GED
- 27% had at least some higher education
- 24% had received special education services while in school

Main income sources among homeless adults

- 20% had steady employment as their primary source of income
- 18% relied mainly on General Assistance
- 15% relied mainly on MFIP (welfare)

Other main sources of income commonly mentioned were temporary labor, friends or relatives, Social Security (disability), and asking for money on the streets.

Total monthly incomes averaged \$498 in 2006 for all homeless adults. Sheltered adults averaged \$532, unchanged from 2003 (before adjusting for inflation). About one-quarter had monthly incomes of \$100 or less, and 18 percent had incomes over \$800.

Employment

- 28 percent of all homeless adults were employed in 2006, compared to 30 percent in 2003 and 41 percent in 2000.
- 12% of all homeless adults were working full time
- 33% of homeless parents were working
- 36% of adults in transitional housing were working, more than those in any other type of shelter
- 12% of homeless adults had been laid off in the previous six months; 10% of those had received unemployment benefits

Wages were lower than in 2003. Of homeless adults working full time in 2006, 64 percent earned less than \$10 an hour compared to 59 percent in 2003; 32 percent earned less than \$8 an hour compared to 26 percent in 2003.

Barriers to employment

The most frequently mentioned barrier to employment was lack of transportation (34%). About one-quarter of respondents cited lack of housing, physical health problems and mental health problems. Other reasons reported were criminal history, and lack of job experience, education or child care.

Health concerns

Homeless people reported high needs for basic health care, dental care, prescription medicines, mental health treatment, and substance abuse treatment. As stated in the key findings, there has been a steady increase in mental health disorders among the homeless for 12 years. In addition, most homeless people suffer from more than one health concern, which multiplies the overall impact. These include:

- **Medical conditions.** Forty-four percent of homeless adults reported at least one chronic health problem, about the same as in 2003. Asthma (or other chronic lung problem) and high blood pressure were the two most frequently reported.
- **Substance abuse.** Overall, 21 percent of homeless adults had been told by a professional within the past two years that they had an alcohol abuse disorder. This is similar to 2003, but much higher than among all Minnesota adults (8%). A drug abuse disorder was similarly reported by 19 percent of homeless adults, also much higher than in the overall population. Thirty-four percent of all homeless adults consider themselves alcoholic or chemically dependent. As in previous years, more men than women reported substance abuse disorders.

- 69% of homeless people had medical coverage during the month of October 2006.

- 44% of homeless adults reported at least one chronic health problem.



- **Head injuries.** Thirty percent had received serious head injuries, followed by the onset of behavioral or emotional symptoms—evidence of likely traumatic brain injury.
- **Cognitive disabilities.** Thirty-three percent of homeless adults reported they often felt confused, had trouble remembering things, or had problems making decisions, to the point that it interfered with daily activities.

Violence and abuse

Both as a cause and an effect of homelessness, violence and abuse are common threads in the lives of homeless adults.

Domestic violence

As in previous years, about one in three homeless women had experienced domestic abuse. This percentage is higher in greater Minnesota (35%) than the Twin Cities metro area (30%). In addition, 33 percent of homeless adults (45% of women and 22% of men) reported that they had stayed in an abusive relationship because they had nowhere else to live.

History of childhood abuse and neglect

Nearly two out of five homeless adults (38%) had been physically abused as a child. As in previous surveys, the proportion was higher for women (44%) than for men (32%). Twenty-six percent of homeless adults had been sexually abused as a child (40% of women and 13% of men). More than one out of five (22%) had been neglected as a child. The 2006 rates are similar to 2003.

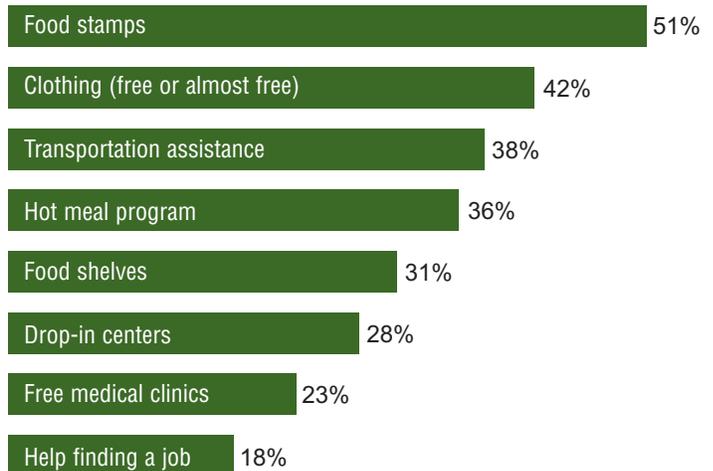
Community violence

In 2006, violence in the neighborhood was a factor for 11 percent of homeless adults leaving their previous housing, similar to 2003. Lack of stable housing puts people at higher risk—18 percent of homeless adults had been physically or sexually assaulted while homeless.

Services

In October 2006, 90 percent of homeless adults received at least one service to assist them.

The services most commonly used were:



Public services and loss of benefits

- 71% of homeless adults had received public medical benefits during the previous 12 months; of these, one in seven (15%) had lost them during that time or become unable to afford them
- 59% of homeless adults had received Food Stamps during the previous 12 months; of these, one in five (19%) had lost them
- 19% of homeless women had received child care assistance in the previous 12 months; of these, 15% had lost them or become unable to afford them
- 11% of homeless adults had lost or were unable to use a Housing Choice (Section 8) voucher at some time in the past (17% of women and 5% of men)
- 8% of homeless adults had lived in a project or public housing at some point but had been evicted or obliged to leave

Affordable housing

Both in the Twin Cities metropolitan area and in greater Minnesota, the median income for all homeless adults in October 2006 was \$400. For those who were employed, the median income in the Twin Cities area was \$800, and in greater Minnesota it was \$680.

It is generally accepted that housing should comprise 30 percent or less of household income to allow a family to pay for other essentials.

Based on fair market rents and monthly incomes of employed homeless adults in October, at the wages earned by homeless adults, even full-time work is not enough to afford housing:

- The rent for a one-bedroom apartment would require 88 percent of the median monthly income for homeless adults in the Twin Cities metro area, and 69 percent of the median monthly income in greater Minnesota.
- The rent for a two-bedroom apartment is higher than the total monthly income of homeless adults in the Twin Cities area. In greater Minnesota, rent on a two-bedroom apartment would consume 87 percent of the median income.

The ability to pay for housing costs varies greatly between employed and unemployed homeless adults:

- 28% of unemployed homeless adults reported being unable to afford any housing costs; 21% reported they could pay at least \$500 a month
- 8% of those employed part-time could not afford to pay anything; 29% reported they could pay at least \$500 a month
- 4% of those employed full time could not afford to pay anything; 61% reported they could pay at least \$500 a month

Barriers to stable housing

In addition to factors related to cost, the most common barriers to stable housing were mental health issues, substance abuse problems, and a criminal record.

Effects of prior institutional living on obtaining stable housing

About two-thirds of homeless adults had prior experience living in a jail, drug or alcohol treatment facility, halfway house, mental health treatment facility or foster home. Many adults who are homeless following time in a residential facility were homeless before they entered it. However, survey responses suggest spending time in treatment and social service placements improves chances of securing stable housing, while time in a correctional facility reduces it.

Homelessness in greater Minnesota

Slightly under one-third (30%) of all homeless adults identified in the survey were living in greater Minnesota. While many measures of homelessness are similar across the state—education levels, ages, length of Minnesota residency, main sources of income—other measures differ.

In greater Minnesota, compared to the Twin Cities metro area, homeless adults were more likely to:

- Be White (63% compared to 32%) and American Indian (17% compared to 9%)
- Have children with them (34% compared to 29%)
- Have a chronic health condition (61% compared to 54%)

In addition, homeless men in greater Minnesota were more likely to be veterans (28% compared to 22%), and homeless women were more likely to be fleeing abuse (35% compared to 30%).

With regard to use of services, homeless adults outside the Twin Cities metro area were much more likely to use food shelves and less likely to use transportation assistance, drop-in centers, free clinics or community voice mail. This is primarily a result of limited service availability in rural areas.

Children and youth

Children

A total of 2,726 children age 17 and younger were homeless with their parents on the night of the survey. The number in shelter programs was fewer than in 2003 (2,501 compared to 2,724), while the increased outreach effort in 2006 counted more homeless children not in formal shelters (225 compared to 138).

Another 1,951 children age 17 and younger were not homeless, but had at least one homeless parent. Most of these children were living with the parent who was not homeless, with other relatives, in foster care or in an adoptive family.

Among parents whose children were with them, about 22 percent reported a child with emotional or behavioral problems, about three times the rate for the overall population.

A full 90 percent reported that all of their school-age children attended school on the day of the survey—the highest percentage since the start of the Minnesota homeless survey in 1991, and very close to the average daily attendance rate for all children in the Minneapolis Public Schools. The main reasons for children not attending that day were children’s illness (30%), school not being held that day (18%), and children not yet enrolled (16%).

Forty-one percent of parents of school-age children reported at least one child with learning disabilities or other school-related problems, up from 38 percent in 2003.

Youth and young adults on their own

When describing young people on their own, to fit with recent changes in legislation, we group homeless persons age 21 and younger in three ways:

- **Youth** age 17 and under and not with their parents
- **Young adults** age 18 through 21
- **Young people** combines both groups to describe all homeless persons ages 21 and under and on their own

Constance and her husband moved into an emergency shelter in Minneapolis with their four younger children this winter when the place they had been staying was sold and they had to move. Though her husband works full time in construction and sells plasma weekly to try to make ends meet, this is their second time in a shelter in nine months. “I can’t believe we’re back again so soon,” she says.

It’s activity time, and while Constance’s 11-year old and 6-year old make T-shirts downstairs, her 4-year-old daughter is busy reciting the alphabet and her 10-month old son—already fast on his feet—is learning to walk. “He sees his older siblings and wants to be like them,” she says.

Constance can’t wait to get settled someplace safe. “I’ll move anywhere if it’s the right place to raise my kids,” she says.



Minnesota's plan for ending long-term homelessness

In 2004, the State of Minnesota launched a Business Plan to End Long-Term Homelessness in Minnesota by 2010. The Plan involves multiple services, sectors, and levels of government with a primary strategy to develop 4,000 permanent supportive housing opportunities that include a place to live and services such as mental health, chemical health, and employability to help ensure long-term stability. This housing is not time-limited, and so not included in Wilder's survey.

On any given night, an estimated 550 to 650 Minnesota youth and 1,300 young adults experience homelessness on their own (not with parents). On October 26, 2006, 151 of these youth and 455 young adults were interviewed in shelters, other temporary housing programs, and places not intended as housing.

Homeless youth on their own are less likely than adults to stay in shelters, more often staying temporarily with friends or in places not intended for habitation. Thus, they are less likely to be found in a one-night survey.

The average age for youth on their own was 16 (19 for young adults). As mentioned in the key findings, racial disparities persist among this group. Most homeless young people grew up in Minnesota, and two-thirds had been homeless before. Almost half of the young adult women had children of their own; 19 percent of female youth had children.

Many homeless young people come from troubled backgrounds and face multiple challenges including mental health issues (49%) and parental neglect (34%). About half had been physically or sexually mistreated, and one-third had considered suicide.

Over 70 percent of young people had been placed outside of the home. Thirty-six percent had been in juvenile detention for a week or more, and 37 percent had been in foster care. Three in 10 (30%) had stayed in an abusive situation because they had no other housing options.

The percentage of homeless youth on their own enrolled in school has climbed steadily, rising from 52 percent in 1994 to 89 percent in 2006. Sixty-one percent reported attending school on the day of the survey. Thirty-five percent of homeless youth reported receiving special education services.

Special populations

Long-term homelessness

In Minnesota, people are considered to be experiencing long-term homelessness if they have been homeless for at least one year, or have experienced four or more episodes of homelessness in the last three years. The 2006 results show that 54 percent of homeless adults (2,586 of those identified in the survey) fit this definition.

When compared to the overall homeless population, those experiencing long-term homelessness were slightly older on average and were more likely to:

- Be male
- Have received special education while in school
- Have been abused or neglected as children and have lived in some type of institutional setting
- Have a disability

They were less likely to:

- Have children with them
- Have finished high school

Adults experiencing long-term homelessness were equally likely to be employed as other homeless adults, but were much more likely to earn under \$8 an hour than the overall homeless population.

Homeless adults in greater Minnesota were less likely to fit the definition of long-term homelessness (47% compared to 57% in the metro area).

Homeless veterans

One in four homeless men is a military veteran, and one-third of homeless veterans served in a combat zone. Homeless veterans have high rates of mental and physical health problems.

Almost all (95%) homeless veterans are men. Compared to other homeless men, homeless veterans were more likely to:

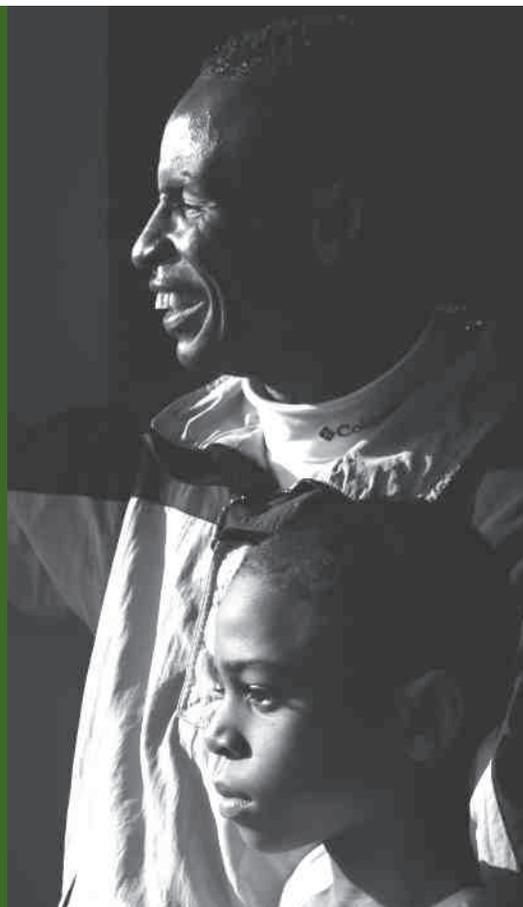
- Be older
- Have a high school diploma or equivalent and some college education
- Have considered or attempted suicide
- Have a mental illness, chemical dependency problem, or a chronic health condition
- Experience post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)

Bryan, 46, and his son, Jacari, 10, have been staying in an emergency shelter. The two had been living in transitional housing provided through a program for single fathers and their children, but Bryan was unable to secure permanent housing when his two years in the program ended. "We stayed with a friend for a while, but then he needed to have his own place," Bryan says.

Bryan is not employed full time, but he is working hard to change that. He had been a fire fighter in Chicago and has applied to be a laborer with the City of Minneapolis. He has also been approved for long term housing, and is waiting to find a place.

"We'll be moving soon," he says. "I'm doing the legwork." Bryan's top priority is making a good life for Jacari. "I've always been in all my kids' lives, but this is 24/7," he says. He took full custody of Jacari in 2004 when he and Jacari's mother split up. "I want to secure housing, get a job, and be the best dad I can be," he says.

Bryan knows things will work out. "I'm not in a panic," he says. "But I'm very grateful for this place."



People not using the shelter system

In the 2006 study, 1,138 homeless adults were interviewed who were not staying in any formal shelter or housing program on the night of the survey, but fit the definition of homelessness. Nearly half were interviewed in greater Minnesota, where they made up 39 percent of all homeless adults identified. By contrast, in the seven-county Twin Cities metropolitan area where shelter services are more available, the non-shelter-using adults who were interviewed were just 18 percent of homeless adults identified.

Those not using the shelter system were about evenly split between those who more often used informal shelter arrangements (temporary stays with family or friends) and those who more often stayed in places not meant for habitation (on the streets, or in vehicles or abandoned buildings).

Compared to other homeless adults, people who had spent considerable time in *informal shelter arrangements* were younger on average and were more likely to:

- Have been incarcerated and used illegal drugs
- Be currently married or living with a partner
- Have dropped out of high school and have received special education services while in school
- Have spent time during childhood in foster care
- Have left a correctional facility in the previous 12 months
- Been homeless for only a short time currently, but more frequently homeless

They were as likely as other homeless adults to be employed, but more earned less than \$8 an hour, and slightly more had been laid off within the past six months.

Compared to other homeless adults, people who had spent considerable time in locations *unintended for shelter* were older on average and less likely to have children with them. They were more likely to:

- Be male
- Have a history of prior institutionalization and homelessness

- Have higher rates of disabilities, including mental illness, drug and alcohol abuse, head injuries, cognitive disabilities, and conditions that limit their ability to work or care for themselves

Homeless older adults

Since 1997, the study has found a growing number of homeless adults age 55 or older. The majority of this group were White or African American males, and they had the highest proportion of military veterans. Compared to other homeless adults, they were more likely to:

- Be unemployed and receiving income from General Assistance and Social Security
- Use drop-in centers and hot meal programs
- Have chronic health conditions and alcoholism

Sixty percent of this group had been homeless for a year or longer.

Homeless ex-offenders

The number of ex-offenders among the homeless population has been steadily increasing from 27 percent in 1997 to 47 percent in 2006. Seventy percent of homeless ex-offenders were men. Compared to other homeless adults, they were more likely to:

- Have been in foster care
- Have served in the military
- Have received special education services
- Have alcohol and substance abuse disorders
- Have serious mental illness, cognitive disabilities and symptoms of traumatic brain injury
- Be unemployed
- Have lived in Minnesota at least two years



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Learn more about homelessness:

This publication presents highlights of the October 2006 homeless survey. Additional key trends and findings and study methodology can be found in *Overview of homelessness in Minnesota 2006*. Find this report and other reports on homelessness at www.wilderresearch.org

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