

## Preface to the 2004 report

When Wilder began its study of homelessness in 1984, the Internet, e-mail, and cell phones were things of the future. We were writing our reports on the typewriter. We certainly did not expect to be doing the same study 20 years later. Many people expected, or at least hoped, that the problems of homelessness would be addressed quickly and solved.

In 1984, Wilder's first survey of the homeless in St. Paul found 129 men and 30 women. Of this group, only six reported they had children with them in the shelter on the night of the survey. In 1984, 40 percent of St. Paul's homeless population were people of color.

In 2004, 20 years later, the profile has changed dramatically. Across the state, homeless women and children greatly outnumber homeless men. In the metro area, two-thirds of the homeless are people of color.

Homeless children are far more common today in Minnesota than they were in 1984. The most recent statewide study shows that one-quarter of all homeless adults have children with them in the shelters in the metropolitan area, and even more – one-third – have children with them in greater Minnesota shelters.

But it is not just the demographics that have changed. In many ways the distress of homelessness is becoming a more concentrated and volatile mixture, especially in the wake of the economic decline of the early 2000s. The homeless have lost ground in employment, dropping from an all-time high of 26 percent working full-time in 2000 to only 13 percent with full-time jobs in 2003. In addition, in the most recent study, homeless adults report the highest rates yet of serious or persistent mental illness (47%). The 2003 study also shows nearly one-third of homeless adults have signs of brain injury, over 4 in 10 have chronic health conditions such as asthma or high blood pressure, and nearly one-third of women are homeless as a result of domestic violence.

The current picture of homelessness in Minnesota shows that the supply of housing affordable to those with low-wage jobs continues to lag far behind the need. But the study also shows that many in this population will need some support, not just housing, in order to make a transition to more stable and productive circumstances. The members of the Governor's Working Group to End Long-Term Homelessness have a difficult job ahead of them. The many factors that contribute to long-term and repeated homelessness will not respond to short-term or single-step solutions.

## PREFACE/SUMMARY

One of the most troubling statistics in the present study is the fact that 8 percent of all homeless parents were homeless as children. This means that for 8 percent of the homeless population today, homelessness has become a generational fact of life. This is one trend we cannot afford to tolerate in Minnesota.

Of special interest in this year's report are four new sections presenting findings in ways not previous analyzed. These are:

- An updated estimate of the number of people who are precariously housed on any given night (page 15).
- An estimate of the total number of people who are homeless over a one-year period (page 25).
- A summary of the characteristics, experiences, and needs of homeless adults who have been released from a correctional facility in the past two years (page 95).
- A comparison of key findings about homeless adults by the kind and amount of shelter services they report using (emergency, transitional, occasionally outside, or often outside) (page 111).

The web-based version of this report provides ready access to detailed results for all of the questions asked of homeless adults in the 2003 statewide survey. In the data tables on the Internet you can compare results by:

- Location (Twin Cities seven-county metro area and greater Minnesota)
- Type of shelter (emergency shelters, battered women's shelters, transitional housing, and unsheltered locations)
- Gender (men and women)

In addition to the detailed data tables, a summary titled *Homeless in Minnesota 2003* is also available on this web site. A growing collection of issue briefs will also be posted here, examining topics like family homelessness, veterans, domestic violence, and street homelessness.

To learn about these and other new resources posted on the Wilder Research Center site, subscribe to the free Random Sampler bimonthly update at [www.wilder.org/research](http://www.wilder.org/research) or by calling 651-647-4600.

## Summary

This study gives a snapshot of the people experiencing homelessness in Minnesota on a single day in October 2003. The findings reported here are based on interviews with 1,501 men and 1,466 women in emergency shelters, battered women's shelters, transitional housing programs, and in non-shelter locations on October 23, 2003 (see Appendix for survey locations). According to providers, 2,118 men and 2,032 women were in living in temporary housing programs on October 23, 2003. Since not every homeless adult is interviewed, the analysis uses weightings of the sample (see "*Background and notes*," page 120, for details on the weighting method) in order to describe the characteristics of the majority of adults and children identified on this date.

### *Key findings*

#### Numbers of homeless

- The most conservative estimate for the total number of homeless and precariously housed persons (persons at imminent risk of losing housing) in Minnesota on October 23, 2003 is 20,347. This includes estimates of those who were "doubled-up" in temporary living situations with others; living on the streets; or residing in shelter or non-shelter locations. This is 2.5 times the estimate of 7,980 homeless people which was made using comparable estimation procedures on October 24, 1991. An updated estimate, based on more geographically detailed and more recent data, finds it likely that closer to 42,000 people were homeless or precariously housed on any given night in Minnesota in 2003.
- On October 23, 2003, there were 7,015 people residing in temporary housing programs in Minnesota, including 2,118 men, 2,032 women, 2,724 children, and 141 unaccompanied youth. Temporary housing programs include emergency and battered women's shelters as well as transitional housing programs. Additionally, the October survey identified 796 persons in non-shelter locations. The total of 7,811 represents a 2 percent increase over the number of homeless persons identified three years earlier (October 26, 2000). The number of available beds in temporary housing programs in July 2003 was 7,304,<sup>1</sup> a decrease of less than 1 percent from October 2000 (7,368 beds).
- The number of emergency shelters and battered women's shelters remained relatively stable since the last statewide survey (October 2000), but the number of transitional housing programs increased by 22 percent, from 98 to 120.

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<sup>1</sup> Minnesota Department of Human Services (formerly the Minnesota Department of Children, Families & Learning). (2003, July). *2003 Shelter Survey Overview*. St. Paul, MN: Author

PREFACE/SUMMARY

Who is homeless?

- In 1991, 1994, and 2003 men made up the majority of homeless adults in Minnesota (60%, 51%, and 52%, respectively). Women constituted the majority of homeless adults in 1997 (53%) and 2000 (51%). The average age of homeless men increased from 34.9 in 1991 to 41.3 in 2003, and the average age of homeless women increased from 31.7 in 1991 to 33.7 in 2003. In every study since 1991, the percent of persons who have never married has remained about the same at 57 to 58 percent.
- Approximately 27 percent of those who were homeless on the night of the survey had lived in Minnesota for two years or less. This percentage has remained stable since the 1997 study when we reported the first significant decline in this percentage. In 1991 and 1994, 39 percent reported migrating from another state within the past two years.
- Over half (53%) of women in temporary housing programs on October 23, 2003, had at least one child with them at the time of the survey. This is lower than in the last two studies (60% in 2000 and 61% in 1997). Over two-thirds (70%) of all homeless children were staying in transitional housing programs.
- The number of homeless families has increased consistently and significantly over the period of the first four statewide surveys (434 in 1991, 807 in 1994, 1,103 in 1997, and 1,413 in 2000) then declined slightly in the 2003 study (1,323 families). Comparing 1991 to 2003, the total number of homeless families has increased by 305 percent.
- Based on quarterly shelter census reports beginning in 1985, the total number of children experiencing homelessness in Minnesota has increased dramatically:
  - 325 children (including 35 unaccompanied youth) in November 1985
  - 990 children (including 124 unaccompanied youth) in November 1991
  - 1,893 children (including 132 unaccompanied youth) in November 1994
  - 2,700 children (including 377 unaccompanied youth) in November 1997
  - 3,067 children (including 373 unaccompanied youth) in November 2000<sup>2</sup>
  - 2,803 children (including 138 unaccompanied youth) in July 2003.<sup>3</sup>

This represents a 763 percent increase from 1985 to 2003.

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<sup>2</sup> Minnesota Department of Children, Families & Learning. (2000, November). *Quarterly shelter survey-Revised*. Roseville, MN: Author. This includes beds in motels used by voucher clients.

<sup>3</sup> Minnesota Department of Human Services (formerly the Minnesota Department of Children, Families & Learning). (2003, July). *2003 Shelter Survey Overview*. St. Paul, MN: Author.

PREFACE/SUMMARY

- Consistent with previous studies, the homeless population contains a disproportionate number of persons of color, particularly African Americans in the Twin Cities metro area<sup>4</sup> (47%) and American Indians (14%) in greater Minnesota. While less than 10 percent of the state's population is made up of persons of color, more than 57 percent of Minnesota's homeless adults are persons of color.
- In 2003, as in 2000 and 1997, more African American women than Caucasian women lived in Twin Cities metro area transitional housing programs (45% vs. 37% in 2003, 52% vs. 29% in 2000, and 40% vs. 32% in 1997). In 1991 and 1994, Caucasian women made up the majority of women using Twin Cities metro area transitional housing programs.
- Persons interviewed in non-shelter locations were predominantly male (64%) and close to half had been homeless for one year or more (47%). American Indians made up 18 percent of those interviewed in non-shelter locations.
- On the day of the survey, military veterans made up approximately 15 percent of the total homeless population (26% of the men and 2% of the women). There were 461 homeless veterans interviewed in the Twin Cities metro area and 240 in greater Minnesota.

Parents and children

- In the 2003 study, 54 percent of parents accompanied by children report that they never married. This is compared to 60 percent of parents that never married according to the 1997 and 2000 studies.
- Two-fifths (38%) of homeless parents report that at least one of their school-age children has some type of learning or school-related problem. About one-quarter (23%) of homeless parents report they have a child with an emotional or behavioral problem and one-quarter (25%) report having a child that repeated a grade in school.
- Nearly one-third (30%) of homeless parents report they have been unable to obtain needed child care. One of 20 homeless parents (5%) report they were unable to obtain needed health care for at least one of their children and 7 percent of homeless parents report their children have had to skip meals in the last month.

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<sup>4</sup> Throughout this report, the "Twin Cities metro area" refers to the seven counties of Hennepin, Ramsey, Anoka, Carver, Scott, Dakota, and Washington.

PREFACE/SUMMARY

Education, employment, and income

- The percent of homeless persons who have completed high school decreased slightly in 2003 (75%) from 1991 (78%). The percentage of persons who have attended at least some college remained about the same (31% in 1991 and 30% in 2003). About half of the respondents in all five studies since 1991 have attended classes to learn a specific job.
- The percentage of employed homeless persons rose from 19 percent in 1991 to 41 percent in 2000, but dropped to 30 percent in 2003. Likewise, the percentage of homeless adults working full-time rose steadily from 8 percent in 1991, to 13 percent in 1994, to 17 percent in 1997, to 26 percent in 2000, then dropped significantly to 13 percent in 2003.
- For those who are not working, an examination of barriers to employment shows that 78 percent of homeless adults interviewed in 2003 have two or more of the eight potential employment barriers addressed in the survey. This compares to 80 percent in 2000, to 62 percent in 1997, and 50 percent in 1994. The most common barriers for women were persistent mental health problems within the last two years (54%), no job for more than one year (50%), transportation (34%), chemical dependency problems within the last two years (30%), and the inability to afford child care (30%). For men, the most common barriers were chemical dependency problems within the last two years (64%), no job for more than one year (53%), persistent mental health problems within the last two years (48%), and transportation (33%).
- The proportion of homeless adults who report they are not able to pay anything for rent increased from 14 percent in 2000 to 21 percent in 2003. The percentage of homeless persons who report they could pay less than \$200 a month for rent also increased from 29 percent in 2000 to 42 percent in 2003.

Public assistance and service use

- Twenty-five percent of homeless adults report receiving MFIP (welfare assistance) in the last 12 months. Of those receiving MFIP benefits, 34 percent had lost the benefit in the last year and 26 percent had been sanctioned. Six percent of homeless adults report receiving family welfare benefits in another state during the past 12 months. Fourteen percent of all homeless adults report the loss of one or more public assistance benefits during the previous 12 months.
- The reported use of Food Stamps dropped from 57 percent in 1991 to 41 percent in 2000 and rose slightly to 46 percent in 2003. Homeless persons receiving either Medical Assistance or General Assistance Medical Care dropped from 63 percent in 1991 to 54 percent in 2003.

**PREFACE/SUMMARY**

- The reported use of free clothing shelves has dropped slightly from 44 percent in 1991 to 40 percent in 2003. The reported use of hot meal programs remained at about one-third in both 1991 and 2003. The reported use of drop-in centers remained stable (approximately 25%) in the first four studies and rose to 30 percent in the 2003 study.

Health and well-being

- The single most common reason women seek temporary shelter in Minnesota is to flee an abusive partner. About one-quarter of homeless women (26%) indicated one of the main reasons they left their last housing was to flee abuse, same as the 1991 study. Thirty-one percent of women surveyed in 2003 were homeless at least in part because of abuse in the last 12 months.
- People who are homeless in Minnesota often had a difficult start in life. In fact, 58 percent of all adults in the present study, compared to 43 percent in 2000 and 49 percent in 1997, were either abused as children, had a child before age 18, or lived in a foster home or treatment facility as a child or youth.
- The percentage of homeless adults reporting physical mistreatment as a child increased from 28 percent in 1991 to 38 percent in 2003. Likewise, the percentage reporting they were sexually mistreated as children increased from 17 percent in 1991 to 27 percent in 2003. In 2003, 23 percent of homeless adults report they were neglected as children.
- Mental illness is a significant problem among those who are homeless in Minnesota. Over two-fifths (42%) of all homeless adults were told by a doctor or nurse within the last two years that they have schizophrenia, manic-depression, some type of delusional disorder, major depression, anti-social personality disorder, or post-traumatic stress disorder. If we include persons with a recent mental health diagnosis or recent treatment for a mental health problem (inpatient or outpatient), the percentage of persons with mental health problems increases to 47 percent. This is an increase from 1994, when 20 percent of adult respondents reported such disorders. (Results cannot be compared with 1991 because questions were asked differently in that interview.)
- Forty percent of homeless men and 27 percent of homeless women report chemical dependency problems. Twenty-five percent of homeless men and 16 percent of homeless women report receiving inpatient alcohol or drug treatment within the last two years. Twenty percent of homeless men and 16 percent of homeless women report receiving outpatient alcohol or drug treatment in the last two years.

PREFACE/SUMMARY

- Seventeen percent of homeless adults report having both a mental illness and a chemical dependency problem (dual diagnosis). This means they have been told by a doctor or nurse within the last two years they have a major mental illness (schizophrenia, paranoia, manic-depression, major depression, anti-social personality or post-traumatic stress disorder) and an alcohol or drug abuse disorder. If persons with recent treatment (inpatient or outpatient) for a mental health problem are added, the percentage of persons with both chemical dependency and mental health problems (dual diagnosis) increases to 18 percent.
  
- The vast majority of homeless respondents (95% in both the Twin Cities metro area and in greater Minnesota) reported their most recent temporary housing arrangements were “reasonably safe.”