



AMHERST H.
WILDER
FOUNDATION
ESTABLISHED 1906

Here for good.

NEWS RELEASE

March 14, 2007

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT:

Greg Owen, research project director, Wilder Research, 651-647-4612

Ellen Shelton, research scientist, Wilder Research, 651-637-2470

Nancy Hartzler, communications, Wilder research, 651-647-4625

Wilder survey reveals leveling off in numbers of homeless people; but more have disabling conditions and acute distress.

Saint Paul – After a decade of dramatic growth in the 1990s, the number of homeless people in Minnesota leveled off or declined slightly, according to initial findings from Wilder Research’s survey of homelessness in Minnesota. However, the proportion of individuals with mental health issues, cognitive disabilities, traumatic brain injuries, and other chronic health concerns is climbing.

The survey, conducted on a single night in October, 2006, counted 7,713 homeless people in shelters, transitional housing, and on the streets. Including an estimate of how many people were homeless, but not found by survey interviewers that night, the total number of homeless people becomes about 9,200.

“In 2006, increased outreach efforts by our statewide partners enabled us to better estimate the number of the ‘hidden homeless’ – non-shelter-using homeless – than we have in prior years,” said Greg Owen, director of the study. “As a result, the total number of homeless people appears slightly higher than the number stated in 2003. Had we used the same estimating method for both 2003 and 2006, the total number of homeless people is comparable, or possibly decreased slightly in 2006,” Owen continued.

A troubling finding is the increase in overall distress. Homeless people report high needs of basic health care, mental health treatment, prescription medicines, and substance abuse treatment.

The percentage of homeless people with serious mental health issues has climbed steadily over the last 12 years and again, is significantly higher in 2006, with over half of both homeless adults and homeless youth reporting a serious mental illness.

With growing attention to the potential long-term effects of traumatic brain injury, Wilder added questions about head injuries in 2003. In 2006, about 30 percent reported problems following a head injury, similar to the findings in 2003. One-third of all adults have cognitive disabilities, many of which affect their ability to work.

“Over the past three homeless studies we have observed increasing levels of impairment with more than 40 percent of the population now reporting three or more disabilities.” said Owen.

On the night of the survey, there were 2,726 children counted with their parents. This is the second survey in a row that showed a slight drop in homeless families and children, but compares to 875 children when this research began in 1991.

Another finding from the survey is a 20 percent drop in the use of transitional housing. “We expect this drop is related to the increased development of permanent supportive housing solutions targeted to long-term homeless people. It is likely many former users of transitional housing now are in this type of permanent housing.” explained Owen.

The 2006 survey also finds that, of all people homeless, 3,852 had been homeless for at least one year or had experienced four or more episodes of homelessness in the previous three years. “These are the people targeted by the state’s Business Plan to End Long-Term Homelessness,” said Laura Kadwell, State Director for Ending Long-Term Homelessness. “We look forward to an in-depth analysis of the survey as it relates to those experiencing long-term homelessness so that adjustments to the Business Plan can be considered.”

Additional findings:

Increase in the number of ex-offenders – Nearly half (47%) of homeless adults have a history of incarceration, up from 27 percent in earlier surveys in the 90s. One in eight (12%) have been released from a correctional facility within the past year. While many were homeless before they entered jail, a larger proportion were without stable housing when they were released, and many report that their record makes it difficult to find housing, employment, or both.

Fewer newcomers to Minnesota – The 2006 study shows only 23 percent of the homeless people in Minnesota came from outside the state in the past two years – and of this group, about one-third had

lived in Minnesota previously. When statewide research on the homeless first began in 1991, nearly one-third of the state's homeless population had come to Minnesota from elsewhere within the most recent two years.

Persistent issues – Racial disparities, domestic violence and childhood trauma persist among homeless people. African Americans and American Indians are significantly over-represented in the homeless population. Homeless adults and youth report high rates of childhood physical abuse, sexual abuse and neglect. Among youth, there is a frequent history of out-of-home placement, with 70 percent of homeless youth reporting previous experiences in a foster home, group home, treatment center or correctional facility. Veterans, including a small number with recent service in Iraq and Afghanistan, continue to make up about one-quarter of the adult male population.

The report, Overview of homelessness in Minnesota 2006, is available at www.wilderresearch.org

Wilder Research, part of the Amherst H. Wilder Foundation in Saint Paul, is one of the nation's largest nonprofit research and evaluation centers dedicated to the field of human services. Wilder Research issues nearly 150 reports per year that help improve the community's understanding of major social issues and identify effective ways to strengthen individuals, families and communities.

###