

## Homelessness among older adults in Minnesota

### Fact sheet: Minnesota statewide homelessness study, 2006

*Prepared for the 60<sup>th</sup> annual Scientific Meeting of the Gerontological Society of America  
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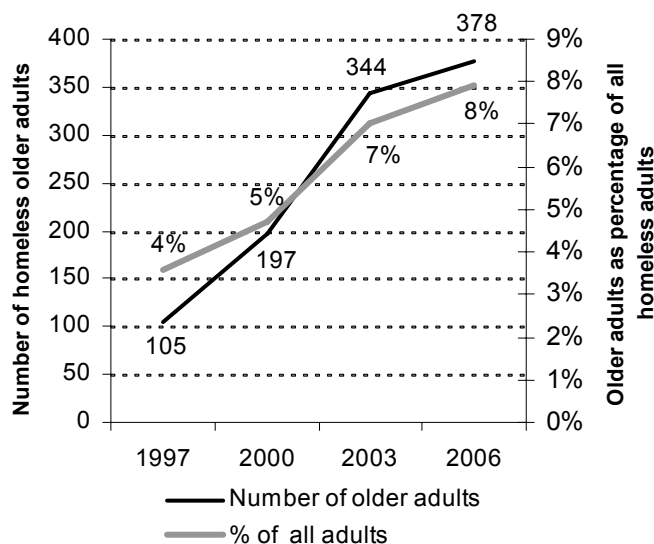
#### About the study

This fact sheet is based on the 378 older homeless adults interviewed on October 26, 2006, as part of the Minnesota statewide homelessness study conducted by Wilder Research every three years. The survey provides a snapshot of people experiencing homelessness in Minnesota. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with respondents in emergency shelters, battered women's shelters, transitional housing, and in non-shelter locations.

The study uses the federal definition of homelessness, which includes anyone whose primary nighttime residence is a supervised, publicly- or privately-operated temporary living accommodation, or somewhere not intended for human habitation.

#### Summary

Since 1997, the study has found a growing number of homeless adults age 55 or older (up from 105 in 1997 to 378 in 2006).



A large majority of older homeless adults interviewed in 2006 were males. Most were white or African American, but, as in the overall homeless population, there are significant racial disparities: 51 percent of older homeless adults were persons of color, compared to about 10 percent of Minnesota's overall population. The males in this over-55-age cohort had the highest proportion of military veterans (44%).

The study also found that older homeless adults were only half as likely to be working as their younger counterparts. In addition, older homeless adults were considerably more likely to be receiving income from General Assistance, Social Security old age benefits, Social Security Disability Insurance, or Supplemental Security Income, and their median monthly income was higher than younger homeless adults.

Sixty percent of older homeless adults reported that they had been homeless for a year or longer. Compared to younger homeless adults, more were staying in emergency shelters and fewer in transitional housing.

Older homeless adults were much more likely to report chronic health conditions that limit daily activities and slightly more likely to report chronic alcoholism than younger homeless adults. They were somewhat more likely than younger homeless adults to use drop-in centers and hot meal programs.

The findings suggest that the general level of physical and mental distress in the older homeless adult population is somewhat higher than for adults in the younger homeless adult population.

## ***Looking at the numbers***

### **Demographics**

Of those older adults interviewed:

- 81% were male, compared to younger homeless adults (50%)
- 51% were persons of color
- 47% were divorced; 23% had never married; 10% were widowed; 9% were separated and 10% were currently married
- Only 1% had a child or children living with them

### **History of homelessness**

Of those older adults who were interviewed:

- 60 % were homeless for at least a year; 7% for less than one month
- 36% were experiencing homelessness for the first time
- 49% were staying in emergency shelters; 31% were in transitional housing programs; 9% were on the street; 5% were in temporary arrangements where they could stay for free, and the remainder were staying in some other type of short-term temporary arrangement

### **Housing history**

Main reasons older adults reported for leaving their last regular or permanent housing were:

- 35% couldn't afford the rent
- 30% lost their job or had their hours cut
- 30% were evicted
- 23% had a drinking or drug problem
- 21% had broken up a relationship with a spouse or partner

Main barriers to obtaining permanent housing were:

- 54% lacked a job or income
- 37% couldn't find affordable housing
- 24% had credit problems
- 19% had a criminal background
- 19% had a bad rental history or court eviction

### **Education and employment**

Of those older adults interviewed:

- 80% had completed high school or received a GED, compared to 73% of younger homeless adults
- 16% were employed, compared to 29% of younger homeless adults
- 7% were employed full-time, compared to 13% in the younger homeless adult population

Unemployed older homeless adults reported that the main barriers to employment were:

- 47% poor physical health
- 36% age
- 25% lack of transportation
- 19% mental health problems
- 16% lack of housing

### **Income and income sources**

Compared to younger homeless adults, older homeless adults had a higher median monthly income (\$500 vs. \$400), and fewer reported that their main source of income was from steady employment (10 percent compared to 21 percent of the younger adult homeless population).

Older homeless adults were more likely than younger homeless adults to report income from:

- General Assistance (30% vs. 17%)
- Social Security [RSDI] (14% vs. 2%)
- Social Security Disability Insurance [SSDI] (14% vs. 5%)
- Supplemental Security Income [SSI] (11% vs. 8%)
- Veterans benefits (4% vs. 1%)

The percentage of older homeless adults and younger homeless adults who reported that they could pay \$200 or less per month for rent was similar (38% vs. 40%). The median amount that older homeless adults could pay was \$250. Most older homeless adults (87%) reported that they only need a one bedroom or studio apartment. To put this in perspective, the current fair market rent for a one bedroom apartment in the Twin Cities metropolitan area is \$707 and in greater Minnesota is \$471.

### **Service use**

Older homeless adults were more likely than younger homeless adults to use:

- Hot meal programs (49% vs. 35%)
- Drop-in centers (36% vs. 27%)
- Free medical clinics (27% vs. 22%)

Older homeless adults were less likely than younger homeless adults to use:

- Food Stamps (41% vs. 52%)
- Transportation assistance (27% vs. 39%)
- Help finding a job (9% vs. 19%)
- Job training (3% vs. 10%)

Older homeless adults were less likely than younger homeless adults to report the loss of medical benefits during the previous 12 month period (37% vs. 47%), but more likely to report the loss of General Assistance benefits (18% vs. 6%), and equally as likely to report the loss of Food Stamps (51%) in the previous 12 months.

Older homeless adults were more likely than younger homeless adults to report that the most helpful services were:

- Hot meal programs (32% vs. 23%)
- Free clothing shelves (22% vs. 17%)
- Drop-in centers (19% vs. 15%)
- Free medical health clinics (18% vs. 13%)

Older homeless adults were less likely than younger homeless adults to report that the most helpful services were:

- Food Stamps (34% vs. 44%)
- Transportation assistance (12% vs. 25%)

### **Military service**

- 36% of older homeless adults had served in the U.S. military (44% of older homeless men)
- 56% of older homeless veterans had served in a combat zone, most in Vietnam (51%)
- 44% of older homeless veterans reported having service connected injuries or illness, mostly mental health problems
- 50% of older homeless veterans have had contact with their county veterans officer in the previous 12 months

- 30% of older veterans are currently receiving veterans benefits of some kind, mostly VA medical benefits

### **Institutional placements**

Older homeless adults were less likely than younger homeless adults to have lived in:

- Foster care (10% vs. 20%)
- A group home (10% vs. 19%)

Older homeless adults were more likely than younger homeless adults to have lived in an alcohol or drug treatment facility (44% vs. 38%), but about equally likely to have lived in a halfway house (26% vs. 25%) or a mental health facility (23% vs. 20%).

### **Incarceration**

- 51% of older homeless adults reported that they had been incarcerated at some time in their life, compared to 46 percent of younger homeless adults
- 11% of older homeless adults had been in a correctional facility in the previous 12 months, compared to 17 percent of younger homeless adults

### **Health and disabilities**

Regarding health care needs, older homeless adults reported:

- Needing to see a dentist (58%)
- Needing to see a professional about a physical health problem (48%)
- Needing to see a professional about a mental health problem (31%)
- Needing to see a professional about an alcohol or drug problem (14%)
- Being unable to obtain needed health care, primarily because of lack of insurance or money (27%)
- Having some type of medical coverage in the month of the study (73%)

With regard to health conditions, 61% of older homeless adults reported having chronic health problems, compared to 43% of younger homeless adults. High blood pressure, asthma, and other lung problems were the conditions most often reported. Half (49%) of older homeless adults reported having serious or persistent mental health problems.

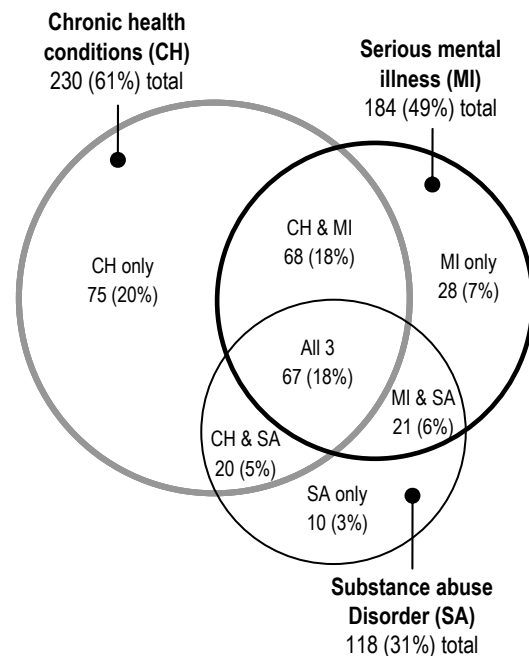
In addition, older homeless adults reported:

- Having a physical, mental, or other health condition that limits the kind or amount of work they can do (59%)
- Having a physical, mental, or other health condition that limits daily activities (23%)
- Feeling confused, having trouble remembering things, or making decisions [to the point that it interferes with their daily activities] (31%)
- Having a history of symptoms suggesting traumatic brain injury (29%)
- Being alcoholic or chemically dependent (36%)

Many older homeless adults suffer from more than one disability, which multiplies the overall impact. The following diagram shows the extent to which chronic physical health problems, serious mental health problems, and substance abuse disorders co-occur in the older adults interviewed in this study.

#### CO-OCCURRING DISORDERS IN OLDER HOMELESS ADULTS

**Total older homeless adults surveyed:** 378 (100%)  
Proportion with none of these three disabilities: 88 (23%)



#### Violence and abuse

Older homeless adults were less likely to report violence and abuse than younger homeless adults:

- Physical abuse as a child or youth (23% vs. 39%)
- Sexual abuse as a child or youth (12% vs. 27%)
- Neglect as a child or youth (13% vs. 22%)

Likewise, older homeless adults were less likely than younger homeless adults to report staying in an abusive relationship because they did not have other housing options (17% vs. 35%) and/or to have been in an abusive relationship in the last 12 months (7% vs. 24%).

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#### For more information

More information about the study, including an overview of the overall findings, can be found on the Wilder Research website  
<http://www.wilder.org/homelessness.0.html>

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