

2006 study

Homeless and near-homeless people on northern Minnesota Indian reservations

Wilder Research

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

Key findings

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Housing and affordability

Service use

Statewide comparison



"This is the first comprehensive data we have had about the state of homelessness in our own community."

- Karen Diver
Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa

About the study

This is the first in-depth study of homelessness and near-homelessness on Minnesota's Indian reservations. The study was conducted in the fall of 2006, by a collaborative of tribal representatives in conjunction with Wilder Research's statewide study of homelessness, and with the assistance of the Corporation for Supportive Housing's Minnesota Program through the American Indian Supportive Housing Initiative. People were interviewed from six reservations - Red Lake, White Earth, Leech Lake, Mille Lacs, Bois Forte, and Fond du Lac.

Special thanks go to the six Tribal Councils, who approved reservation participation, and also to the tribal representatives who identified people on their reservations who were without regular and adequate housing, and who recruited trusted interviewers who were essential to obtaining a comprehensive sampling. Thanks are due to the 674 homeless and near-homeless people who agreed to be interviewed and to share their circumstances and experiences so that the problem of homelessness could be better understood and better addressed.

We also thank our funders (listed on page 19).

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.

Near-homelessness. In this report, all respondents who were staying temporarily in other people's homes (doubling up) are classified as “near-homeless.”

Key findings

Over 1,200 people are homeless or near-homeless

The survey identified 1,239 people who were homeless or near-homeless on the six reservations participating in the study. This number included 447 children (age 17 or younger) with their parents, and 146 youth and young adults (age 21 or younger) on their own. Because not all eligible people could be interviewed, we know that this number is less than the actual number of persons lacking stable housing.

Homelessness and doubling up are sometimes interchangeable

The federal definition of homelessness does not include doubling up with family and friends, and so tells only part of the story in describing the experience of homelessness on Indian reservations. On reservations extended family ties are strong, and traditions dictate that those who have housing will take in those who do not, if at all possible.

Doubling up with family or friends is often the last housing arrangement a person has before becoming literally homeless, and it is common for people to go back and forth between doubling up and homelessness.

About 1 in 10 of those interviewed were literally homeless at the time of the study—that is, staying in a formal shelter or transitional housing program, or sleeping outdoors, in a vehicle or abandoned building, or other place not meant for habitation. An additional 2 in 10 had spent at least one night in the previous month sleeping in a place not meant for habitation.

High levels of economic distress; lower levels of individual distress

The average monthly income among homeless and near-homeless adult respondents was just \$517 per month. Fewer than one-third (31%) of adults in the study were employed and only 18 percent had full-time jobs. This level is similar to the statewide homeless study findings. Barriers to employment included lack of education and employment history; lack of employment opportunities, transportation and housing; and substance abuse problems.

Levels of individual distress (including mental illness, chemical dependency, chronic illness, and child abuse and neglect) are lower among homeless and near-homeless adults on the reservations when compared to the statewide homeless population. Among all adult reservation respondents, the survey found those who were homeless reported higher levels of individual distress than those who were doubled up.

Many people double up for a long time, but move often

Nearly two-thirds of doubled-up people had been staying “temporarily” with others for over a year. Of this group, few had been in the same place for 12 consecutive months, and over one-third had been in four or more places in the past 12 months.

Most people in doubled-up housing have essential utilities

Among survey respondents who were doubled up, just 15 percent reported their housing was substandard — that is, lacking electricity, running water, a flush toilet, or central heat. While this is a serious concern for the residents of such housing, it is a positive finding that 85 percent reported their housing had all of these critical features.

Overcrowding is widespread

Nearly two-thirds of doubled-up people were living in housing that is overcrowded — that is, has more residents than rooms. The overall average was 1.5 residents per room, but substandard housing units averaged 1.8 residents per room.

Shortage of housing

Shortage of affordable housing is a problem statewide, including on the reservations. In addition, on the reservations, a shortage of housing in general is itself a key issue. Not all of the need is for separate, single-family homes. While some 3- and 4-bedroom housing units are needed, one-third of survey respondents report that an efficiency apartment would be enough to meet their needs, and another 14 percent only need a one-bedroom unit.

Survey findings disprove the stereotype that overcrowding occurs because American Indians prefer to double up with extended family: 98 percent of doubled-up respondents would prefer to be in their own housing if they could find or afford it.

What do these findings mean?

The survey results, combined with what is known from other research, highlight the importance of addressing housing shortages before people become homeless.

Consequences of overcrowding

The survey found high levels of overcrowding and moving around among people who were doubled up. These conditions can lead to a variety of additional problems.

A study of residential crowding in American Indian communities (National American Indian Housing Council, 2001) found that residents and community professionals tend to describe different kinds of problems associated with overcrowded housing.

Household residents most often cite difficulties related to privacy, storage, and lack of space for activities. Health, education, and social work personnel most often raise concerns related to the greater transmission of colds and other more serious infectious diseases; poorer health conditions due to the stress of overcrowding (which can cause more severe results for people sharing housing with a person who smokes, for example); or the increased effects if any household member has problems with mood, anger control, or substance use. In addition, the crowding and amount of activity can interfere with school-age children’s sleep, while the interruptions caused by frequent moves can cause children to fall behind in school.

All of the approximately 450 children who were identified in this survey are considered homeless under the federal definition — and we know that there are additional children with doubled-up parents who were not surveyed. Compared to their classmates in more stable housing, these children’s overcrowded and less stable housing puts them at higher risk of poor educational outcomes. Addressing their housing conditions will help to improve their current academic success as well as their lifetime opportunities.

Doubling up and public benefits

The reservation survey found low employment rates and incomes, and inconsistent access to supportive services and public benefits.

An analysis of Current Population Survey data (Poverty and Race Research Action Council, 1995) found that doubled-up families across the U.S. had high poverty rates, but were less likely than other poor families to receive public benefits. The study found that it was hard for doubled-up families to re-establish independence, because once they were sharing a household with others they could no longer qualify for benefits as a separate family entity, but without separate benefits they could not afford the cost of living separately.

Attention to the needs of people who are close to being homeless but have not yet become homeless can help to prevent some of the greater problems that follow from homelessness. For example, people who are homeless are often more vulnerable to illness and violence, and have a harder time getting or keeping jobs. In addition, even when needs are otherwise equal, it is often easier to address the problems of people who still have the benefit of stability and social support that are more typical when they are staying with friends or family.

Numbers of homeless and near-homeless

To understand the full picture of homelessness on the reservations, the study included not only people who fit the federal definition of homelessness, but also people who were staying temporarily with friends or family because they were unable to find or afford a place of their own. Research has consistently found that doubling up is a common response to homelessness in rural communities, including Indian reservations, where there are fewer formal shelter programs than in urban areas.

Moreover, although people staying with family or friends are not considered homeless under the federal definition, the distinction between the two groups is not clear-cut. Many people go back and forth between temporary stays with family or friends and sleeping outdoors, in cars, or other situations that fit the definition of homelessness. Of the people identified in this study as doubled up, 21 percent had spent at least one night during October in a place not intended for habitation. Among those doubled up in substandard housing, the proportion was 29 percent.

“These findings will help us quantify what we know, from experience, to be true. The results also show us that many of these doubled-up arrangements are not stable, and frequently result in actual homelessness. When an individual or family does not have a home base to operate from, everyday life activities — such as maintaining employment, getting kids to school, or scheduling doctor’s appointments can become overwhelming.”

- Carol Priest
Red Lake Homeless Shelter Executive Director



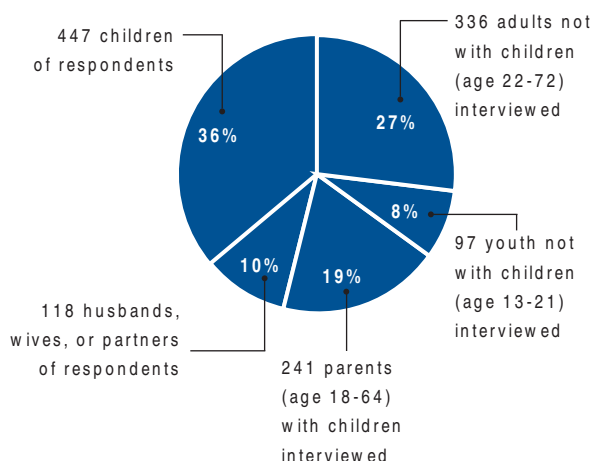
We identified three groups of respondents:

- **Homeless.** The survey identified 114 people who fit the federal definition of homelessness (9% of those interviewed).
- **Doubled up and in substandard housing** (missing essential features such as electricity). The survey identified 170 people in this category (14% of those interviewed).
- **Doubled up and in housing not identified as substandard.** The survey identified 955 people in this category (77% of those interviewed).

These numbers are a minimum, not an estimate

The figure below shows the number of people who were interviewed, plus others in their families who were with them at the time of the study. It was not possible to interview every person who lacked fixed and adequate housing on the date of the survey, and not every person who was identified as eligible chose to participate in the survey. As a result, we know that the total of 1,239 people is lower than the actual number of people who were homeless or near-homeless at the time of the survey. Moreover, the number changes from day to day based on individual circumstances and changes in job and housing availability.

HOUSEHOLD MEMBERSHIP OF 1,239 HOMELESS AND NEAR-HOMELESS PEOPLE ON NORTHERN MINNESOTA INDIAN RESERVATIONS, FALL 2006



Only one person per family was included in the survey, so the 674 persons who were interviewed represent 674 homeless and near-homeless families. Of these, 241 are considered “families” by standard homeless reporting definitions – that is, they included one or more parents or guardians accompanied by one or more minor children. Of the remaining 433 who would be considered individuals or singles in standard homeless reporting, 359 were not accompanied by a child or a spouse or partner, and 74 were with a spouse or partner but not a child.

Doubled up: Living with others

Length of stay: Longer does not mean more stable

Nearly two-thirds (62%) of people had been living “temporarily” with others for over a year, and almost one-third (31%) had been without housing of their own for three years or longer. Youth on their own were most likely to report shorter periods of doubling up, while single adults were most likely to report longer periods of living with friends or relatives.

Those who live with others for longer periods of time are not necessarily in more stable housing. Often, people who have doubled up for long periods have moved several times within that period. Of those who had been without a place of their own for a year or longer, only 19 percent had been in the same place for the last 12 months, and 41 percent reported living in four or more different places. However, most people (84%) reported they could stay where they currently were for another month without being asked to leave.

Among the 16 percent who expected to leave their current housing arrangement within a month, 65 percent expected to move in temporarily with someone else, 18 percent expected to move to their own apartment or house, and 17 percent expected to go to a homeless shelter or somewhere not meant for habitation—on the street or in a car, abandoned building, or 24-hour business.

Just under 5 percent of respondents who were doubled up lacked full plumbing or a full kitchen.

By comparison, for rural Minnesota as a whole, the 2000 Census found that only 0.7 percent of housing units lacked full plumbing, 0.6 percent lacked full kitchens, and 1.7 percent lacked telephone service.

Full plumbing: Has both hot and cold running water, at least one flush toilet, and at least one tub or shower.

Full kitchen: Includes a refrigerator, a kitchen sink with running water, and a cook top and oven (either separately, or together in a single appliance).

Nearly all people (98%) staying with others would prefer a place of their own, and 83 percent were currently looking for housing. About a third (35%) of those not currently looking for housing said they had tried to get help to find housing. People with families were most likely to have requested help, while youth on their own were least likely to have done so.

Housing conditions: Most overcrowded, few substandard

According to the U.S. Census, housing is considered overcrowded when there are more residents than number of rooms. Nearly two-thirds (63%) of respondents were living in overcrowded housing. The average number of residents per room was 1.5 (a level considered “severely over-crowded” by the Census Bureau), and the average number for families was even higher (1.8). While over half (58%) of the doubled-up respondents reported five or fewer people living together, in one case 17 people occupied the same housing unit.

Most housing (94%) had full plumbing, although 5 percent did not have both hot and cold running water, 4 percent lacked a flush toilet and 3 percent lacked a tub or shower. Most housing also had full kitchens (93%), although 2 percent lacked a refrigerator, 4 percent lacked a sink, and 4 percent lacked a stove top and/or an oven.

Housing was considered substandard if it lacked running water, a flush toilet, electricity, or central heat. Only 14 percent lacked any of these features: 4 percent had no flush toilet, 3 percent lacked running water, 1 percent lacked electricity, and 11 percent lacked central heating.

People living in substandard housing were also more likely to be severely overcrowded: 59 percent of respondents in substandard housing had 1.5 or more residents per room, compared to 44 percent of respondents in housing not identified as substandard.

In addition, 19 percent of all doubled-up respondents were in housing that did not have telephone service.

Who are the homeless and near-homeless?

Unless otherwise stated, the sections that follow describe all adults age 18 or older who were interviewed on the reservations, including those who were literally homeless and those who were doubled up in adequate or sub-standard housing. Where appropriate, we have included comparisons to the statewide survey of homeless persons (for example, “50% statewide”). Note that the statewide survey does not include people who were doubled up on the date of the survey. It does include those who may have been doubled up with others one or more times during the previous month, while still meeting the federal definition of homelessness.

Age

- The average age for homeless and near-homeless adults (18 and older) in the reservation survey was 32 for men and 31 for women (41 and 33 statewide).
- Eight youth age 17 or younger were interviewed who were not staying with a parent or guardian. All of these youth were doubled up; none was literally homeless. (Studies elsewhere find that unaccompanied homeless youth are among the most invisible of people who experience homelessness; this number is likely to be an undercount of the actual number of unaccompanied youth.)
- Six percent of all those interviewed (38 persons) were age 55 or older. Only one of these was literally homeless, and all but six of the others were in housing that was not identified as substandard.

Families

Overall, 241 respondents had 447 children with them on the night of the survey. Half (50%) of the children were with a single mother or other female guardian, 11 percent were with a single father or male guardian, and 39 percent were with two parents or guardians. (In the statewide homeless study, 76 percent of children were with a single mother or female guardian, 3 percent were with a single father or male guardian, and 20 percent were with two parents or guardians.)

Parents had an average of 2.3 minor children (age 17 or younger). They had an average of 1.9 children living with them at the time of the survey.

Education and employment

Census shows economic distress on reservations

The 2000 Census shows high levels of economic distress on the six reservations that participated in this study. Average household income was less than two-thirds that of Minnesotans statewide (\$29,377 compared to \$47,111), and the unemployment rate of 11 percent was nearly three times the statewide rate of 4 percent. Nearly one-quarter of adults (23%) did not have a high school education (compared to 12% statewide). Findings from the survey of homeless and near-homeless adults on the reservation reflect these background conditions.

Education among adults

- 34% of homeless and near-homeless adults on the reservation had no high school diploma (26% of homeless adults statewide)
- 52% had a high school diploma or GED (47% statewide)
- 14% had at least some higher education (27% statewide)
- 21% had received special education services while in school (24% statewide)

Main income sources among adults

Nearly one in five (19%) of respondents had no income during October (13% statewide). Two in five (39%) had just one source of income (42% statewide), but others had two or more different sources. Of those respondents who had income, they most often reported their main sources were:

- 27% steady employment (20% statewide)
- 17% MFIP (welfare) (15% statewide)
- 10% day or temporary labor (9% statewide)
- 9% tribal money (less than 1% statewide)
- 8% General Assistance (18% statewide)

Employment

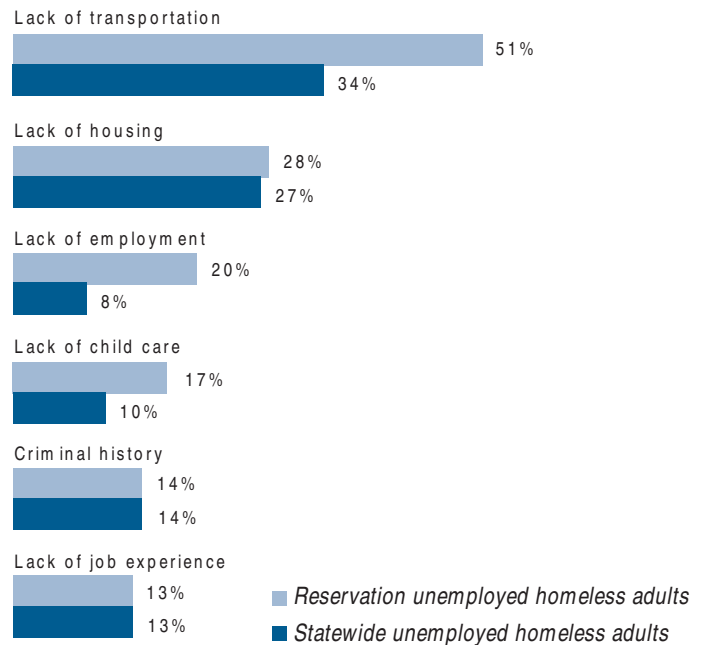
- 31% of adults were employed at the time of the survey (28% statewide).
- 18% of adults were employed 35 hours a week or more (12% statewide).
- Two-thirds (66%) of people with jobs were paid less than \$10 per hour (71% statewide), and one-third (31%) received less than \$8 per hour (42% statewide).
- Average monthly income (from all sources) for adults was \$517 (\$498 statewide). Average income was higher for women (\$545) than men (\$484) (\$481 and \$240 statewide).

Barriers to employment

The survey provides some insight into likely barriers to employment for those who were not working at the time of the survey. These include:

- **No recent employment history:** 47% had been unemployed a year or longer (53% statewide).
- **Lack of education:** 37% of those who were unemployed did not have a high school diploma or GED equivalent (28% statewide).
- **Substance abuse problems:** 34% of those who were unemployed reported having an alcohol or drug abuse disorder or having been treated for a substance abuse problem recently (41% statewide).
- **Criminal record:** 34% of those who were unemployed had spent time in a jail or prison in the last two years, or reported that an earlier criminal record was a problem (26% statewide).
- **Disability:** 26% of those who were unemployed reported having a physical, mental, or other health condition that limits the kind or amount of work they can do (51% statewide).

When unemployed respondents were asked what they considered their greatest problems in seeking work, they gave similar answers to the above. However, their answers also give important insight into the availability of resources and opportunities in the area. The barriers they most frequently mentioned were:



Health concerns

Data from the 2000 U.S. Census show disability rates among adults (age 21 through 64) in the general population on the reservations were double the rates for adults in the general population statewide (30% vs. 14%).

Medical conditions

About one-third (31%) of adult homeless and near-homeless respondents in the reservation survey reported at least one chronic health condition (44% of homeless adults statewide). Chronic health conditions were higher among women (34%) than men (27%). High blood pressure, chronic respiratory problems (including asthma), and diabetes were the most common conditions.

Substance abuse

Twenty-nine percent of adult respondents consider themselves alcoholic or chemically dependent (34% statewide). Fourteen percent had been told in the last two years that they had an alcohol abuse disorder (21% statewide), and 9 percent had been told they had a drug abuse disorder (19% statewide). Alcohol abuse disorder was slightly higher among men (16%) than women (12%), while drug abuse disorder was slightly higher among women (10%) than men (8%).

Mental illness

Seventeen percent of adult respondents had been told by a medical professional in the last two years they had a significant mental illness (45% statewide). Including others who had received inpatient or outpatient care during the same time period for mental health problems, 23 percent of adults have a serious mental illness (52% statewide). Major depression was the most reported illness (13%) followed by post-traumatic stress disorder (6%), bipolar disorder (5%), and antisocial personality disorder or another severe personality disorder (5%).

Head injuries

Twenty percent of adult respondents had received serious head injuries, followed by the onset of behavioral or emotional problems—evidence of likely traumatic brain injury (TBI) (30% statewide).

Cognitive disabilities

Fifteen percent of adult respondents reported they often felt confused, had trouble remembering things, or had problems making decisions, to the point that it interfered with daily activities (33% statewide).

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

Fourteen percent of adult women respondents were fleeing domestic abuse situations (32% statewide). One-quarter (24%) of women had stayed in an abusive situation at some time because they did not have any other housing options (45% statewide).

History of childhood abuse and neglect

About one in six (18%) of adult respondents had been physically abused as a child (38% statewide). The proportion was higher for women (23%) than for men (13%). Eleven percent of adult respondents had been sexually abused as a child (26% statewide). Again, the percentages were higher for women (17%) than for men (4%). More than one out of seven (15%) of respondents reported that their parents had ever neglected to provide them with food, shelter, or medical care as a child, or left them unsupervised for long periods of time when they were too young to be on their own (22% statewide).

Community violence

Twelve percent of adult respondents (and 14% of women) reported violence in the neighborhood was a factor for leaving their previous housing (11% of adults statewide). The survey results show lack of stable housing puts people at a higher risk of violence—9 percent of respondents (including 12% of women) had been physically or sexually attacked while they had been without a regular place to live (18% statewide).

“To help our native men, women, and children who struggle to overcome homelessness, we must, and will, continue to build partnerships that advocate for changes in public attitudes and policy that meet our unique challenges.”

- George Goggleye, Jr.
Leech Lake Band Chairman

Income, housing needs, and affordability

The median income for adult respondents was \$400 per month (the same as statewide). For those who were employed, the median income was \$900 per month (\$700 statewide), and for those who were not employed the median income was \$203 per month (\$208 statewide).

One-third (32%) of adults reported that an efficiency apartment (no separate bedrooms) would be enough for them. Fourteen percent need one bedroom; 29 percent need two bedrooms; 19 percent need a three-bedroom unit; and 5 percent need four or five bedrooms.

Overall, the median amount adult respondents reported they could pay for housing (rent and utilities) was \$200 per month (\$250 statewide); for those with jobs, the median amount was \$400 per month, while for those without jobs it was \$100 per month (\$400 and \$160 statewide). These figures include one-quarter (24%) of respondents who reported they would be unable to pay anything (22% statewide).

Housing shortage vs. affordable housing shortage

2000 Census data show 21 percent of reservation residents paying an unaffordable amount for rent (more than 30 percent of income) – about the same as the 22 percent of Minnesotans statewide. The percentage among renters was lower than statewide (26% vs. 35%). This suggests that in 2000 the affordability of housing was less of a problem on these reservations than the shortage of housing overall. We do not have data on the rates of overcrowding for the reservations or the state as a whole, but the rates documented in this survey appear to replicate findings of other studies showing a relatively high rate of overcrowding on reservations compared to elsewhere.

Barriers to stable housing

Common barriers to housing are listed below, together with the percentage of respondents who indicated it was a barrier:

- Lack of a current job: 67% of respondents are currently unemployed (72% statewide).
- History of unstable housing: 59% have been homeless before (71% statewide).
- Criminal background: 31% have spent time in a jail or prison (47% statewide).
- Lack of income: 30% report they could afford less than \$200 per month for housing (42% statewide).

When the respondents were asked what prevents them from getting housing, their most frequent answers were very similar to barriers listed above:

- Lack of a job or income (44%) (45% statewide).
- No housing they can afford (35%) (31% statewide).
- Credit problems (15%) (20% statewide).
- Criminal background (12%) (16% statewide).

Effects of prior institutional living

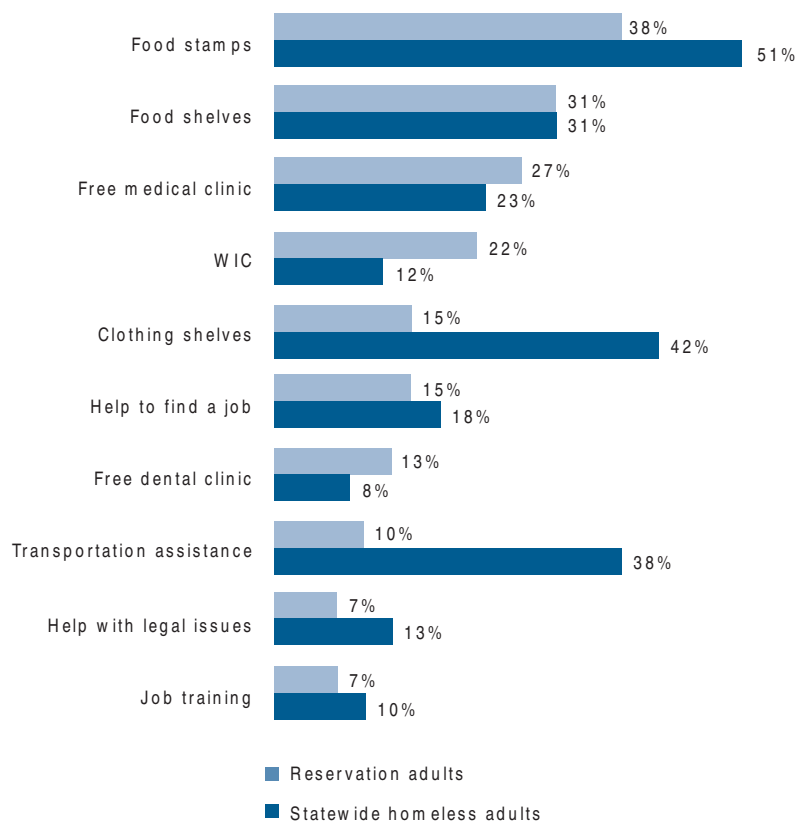
About two-thirds of respondents (69%) have prior experience living in a jail, drug or alcohol treatment facility, halfway house, mental health treatment facility or foster home (the same as the 69% in the statewide survey). Many respondents who were homeless following time in a residential facility were homeless before they entered it. Of adults who had left a facility within the past year:

- 62% were homeless when they entered a social services or treatment facility, compared to 49% who lacked stable housing when they left.
- 51% were homeless when they entered a jail or prison, and 53% lacked stable housing when they left.

Services

In October 2006, 73 percent of adult respondents received at least one service to assist them.

The services most commonly used were:



Public services and loss of benefits

- 53% of adult respondents had received public medical benefits during the previous 12 months.
- 45% of adult respondents received Food Stamps during the previous 12 months (59% statewide); of these, 11% had lost them (19% statewide).
- 24% of adult respondents (including 38% of women) had received WIC (supplemental food program) during the previous 12 months (15% and 29% statewide); of these, 5% had lost WIC benefits (8% statewide).
- 25% of adult respondents (including 39% of women) had received MFIP (family welfare) during the previous 12 months (24% and 43% statewide); of these, 58% had had exited MFIP or been sanctioned (41% statewide).

“This is the first comprehensive data we have had about the state of homelessness in our own community. It will help with program planning within our community, build understanding, and help us with advocacy efforts in the broader community.”

- Karen Diver

Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior
Chippewa Chairwoman

Special populations

Doubled-up children and youth are considered “homeless”

The unstable living conditions typically associated with doubling up often make it difficult for doubled-up children and youth to keep up in their schoolwork, and difficult for schools to serve them. The federal definition of homelessness recognizes this by including doubled-up children in the definition of homelessness, including both children who are with their parents or guardians and unaccompanied youth who are on their own. Federal law also includes specific policies, and some funding, for schools to provide appropriate educational services.

Children and youth with their parents

The homeless and near-homeless people who were interviewed are the parents of 447 children age 17 and younger who were with them on the night of the survey. Forty-two of these children were with their parents in shelter programs or unsheltered locations. In addition, 63 were doubled up in substandard housing, and 342 were doubled up in housing not identified as substandard.

Just under half of parents (47%) had at least some minor children who were not living with them at the time of the survey. There were a total of 378 children living away from these parents. Most of them were living with the other parent or another relative or friend; 5 percent of parents reported having a child in foster care (5% statewide).

Among parents whose children were with them, 7 percent reported a child with emotional or behavioral problems, about the same rate as in the overall population (22% in the statewide homeless survey). One-third (33%) reported having been unable to obtain regular child care during the previous 12 months when they had needed it (32% statewide). Of parents with school-age children, one in five (20%) reported having a child with learning or school problems (41% statewide).

Eighty-eight percent of parents with school-age children reported that all of their school-age children attended school on the day of the survey (90% statewide).

“The importance for Tribes to participate in this report quantifies the urgent need for housing on Indian reservations. It gives Tribes an opportunity to bring to the forefront plaguing housing issues that have been historically accepted as normal, while in reality living in over-crowded conditions is not a cultural preference.”

- Delina White

Bug O Nay Ge Shig School Resource Developer, Leech Lake



Youth and young adults on their own

This survey interviewed 8 youth (age 17 and younger) and 138 young adults (age 18 through 21) who were on their own, not staying with a parent or guardian.

- The average age for youth on their own was 16; for young adults, it was 19 (also 16 and 19 statewide).
- Over half (57%) of youth and young adults were female (60% statewide).
- Nearly three-quarters (72%) had been homeless before (71% statewide).
- Over half of the young adult women (54%) had children of their own with them; 15 percent of young adult men had children with them (48% and 6% statewide). None of the youth (age 17 or less) had children with them (8% statewide).

Youth and young adults who are homeless are more likely than those in stable housing to come from troubled backgrounds and to face multiple challenges, including mental health issues (17%) and parental neglect (13%) (45% and 34% statewide). Eleven percent had been physically or sexually mistreated (50% statewide), and 7 percent had considered suicide (32% statewide).

Nearly two-thirds (66%) of youth and young adults had been placed outside of the home (70% statewide). Four in ten (41%) had been in juvenile detention for a week or more, and 22 percent had been in foster care (36% and 37% statewide).

Military veterans

Ten percent of men in the survey were military veterans, and 18 percent of veterans had served in a combat zone (24% and 31% statewide). Veterans who were surveyed had higher rates of mental and physical health problems than non-veteran adults, and were almost twice as likely to consider themselves alcoholic or chemically dependent (a pattern also seen among veterans in the statewide survey). One in five veterans (21%) reported having service-related health problems (40% statewide).

Literally homeless individuals

People who fit the federal definition of homelessness on the date of the survey (living in a formal shelter or transitional housing program, or sleeping in cars, outdoors, or other places not meant for habitation) were 9 percent of all those who were interviewed (100% statewide). As discussed earlier, the distinction between this group and those who are doubled up is not always clear, because many people go back and forth between the two kinds of arrangements from night to night.

Adult respondents who were literally homeless on the date of the survey are in many respects very similar to adults who were doubled up. The two groups had similar rates of employment and similar average incomes. They were equally likely to report that a medical professional had told them they had an alcohol abuse disorder. However, in many respects the two groups were quite different.

Compared to literally homeless adults, adults who were doubled up at the time of the survey were more likely to be male, to be 21 or younger or 55 or older. They were more likely to have used a free medical or dental clinic during October. They were more likely to report that their main source of income was day or temporary labor.

Compared to adults who were doubled up, literally homeless adults were more likely to report having a serious mental illness, to consider themselves alcoholic or chemically dependent, to have suffered a traumatic brain injury, or to have been incarcerated. They were more likely to report having experienced abuse or neglect during childhood, and more likely to report having stayed in an abusive situation for lack of other housing. They were more likely to report that General Assistance was their main source of income, and they were more likely to have received public medical benefits, Food Stamps, MFIP, or transportation assistance, or to have used clothing shelves recently.

The table in the appendix gives more details on these comparisons.

Homeless and near-homeless adults on the reservations compared to homeless statewide

The Appendix contains a table comparing homeless and doubled-up adults (18 and older) on the reservations with homeless American Indians and other homeless adults who were interviewed as part of the statewide survey in October 2006. In general, reservation respondents report lower levels of individual distress (problems with health or violence), but equal levels of economic distress (lack of employment and income).

Reservation respondents were less likely than either of the homeless groups statewide to report problems with alcohol or drug abuse, chronic health conditions, mental illness, cognitive disabilities, or head injuries. They were also less likely to report childhood experiences with physical or sexual abuse or parental neglect, and women were less likely to report having left a prior housing arrangement because of domestic violence.

Compared to homeless adults statewide, reservation respondents were less likely to have graduated from high school. They were equally likely to report they had ever been in jail or prison.

Respondents on the reservation were equally likely as homeless non-Indians statewide to be working, and more likely to be working than homeless Indians statewide. They were more likely than both statewide groups to be working full-time. Reservation respondents were more likely than either statewide group to report that employment barriers included lack of job opportunities, lack of transportation, or lack of child care.

Study methods

About the study

In 2006 a group of people from six northern Minnesota Indian Reservations – Red Lake, White Earth, Leech Lake, Mille Lacs, Bois Forte, and Fond du Lac — along with the Corporation for Supportive Housing, the Minnesota Coalition for the Homeless, Wilder Research, and the Minnesota Department of Human Services met to discuss the feasibility of a survey to better understand homelessness on Minnesota's Indian reservations.

The six Tribal Councils gave approval to participate, and a reservation study was conducted in conjunction with the statewide homelessness survey that Wilder conducts every three years. Band representatives used a variety of methods and sources to identify people on their reservations who were without regular and adequate housing on October 26, 2006.

Each Band recruited interviewers who could help convince respondents to answer the interviews and inspire confidence that responses would be kept confidential. Some Bands supplemented paid Band member interviewers with volunteers from the cooperating agencies. All interviewers were trained by the study director in methods for unbiased social science interviewing as well as familiarity with the questions in the interview. Training was conducted by a combination of video disk and interactive television. Face-to-face interviews were conducted during October and/or November, in community centers and in the locations where people were staying (doubled-up in other people's houses or in unsheltered locations). A total of 674 eligible people were interviewed on the six reservations.

Interpretation of findings

The survey was completely voluntary, and respondents who chose to participate could skip questions they were not comfortable answering. In addition, Bands could identify questions that would not be asked on their reservations. Therefore, not all questions include answers for all eligible respondents. In addition, some questions (especially those relating to certain kinds of health) are personal and sensitive, and it is likely that some levels of trauma and distress are under-represented as a result.

Figures for housing quality underestimate the number of houses that lack essential features, because missing data (where a respondent skipped a question) are counted as if the respondent reported the feature was present. In particular, the figure of 11 percent lacking central heat is likely to be low, because the question about central heat was added after surveys had been printed, and it was sometimes overlooked. If everyone had answered the question, the proportion lacking central heat would likely be closer to 15 percent.

About the triennial statewide survey of homelessness

This reservation study was done in conjunction with a statewide survey of homeless persons that Wilder Research does every three years. In the statewide survey, trained volunteer interviewers conduct face-to-face interviews with adults and unaccompanied youth who are in emergency shelters, battered women's shelters, or transitional housing programs, or who are staying in places not meant for habitation. Unlike the reservation survey, the statewide survey does not include adults whose primary nighttime residence is doubled up in another person's house or apartment.

More information about the statewide study, including highlights from the 2006 findings, can be found on the Wilder Research web site (www.wilderresearch.org).

"We've known for years that we have a problem with homelessness on our reservations in Minnesota. This study provides the hard evidence. It will help us leverage resources to address this critical issue."

- Melanie Benjamin
Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe Indians
Chief Executive

	RESERVATION SURVEY				STATEWIDE HOMELESS SURVEY			
	Doubled up adults		Homeless adults		Adult Indians		Other adults	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Adults surveyed, fall 2006^(a)	604	100%	62	100%	521	100%	4,205	100%
Gender								
Men	290	48%	25	40%	228	44%	2,258	54%
Women	311	52%	37	60%	293	56%	1,948	46%
Age group								
18-21	135	22%	4	6%	61	12%	543	13%
22-54	433	72%	57	92%	438	84%	3,315	79%
55 and older	36	6%	1	2%	22	4%	349	8%
Education								
Less than high school	196	34%	18	31%	150	29%	1,068	26%
High school only	295	52%	34	59%	262	51%	1,901	46%
Some college	81	14%	6	10%	101	20%	1,150	28%
Special Education while in school	99	20%	11	28%	117	23%	986	24%
Currently employed	180	31%	17	29%	96	19%	1,229	30%
Working 35+ hours per week	105	18%	9	15%	28	5%	528	13%
Main job barriers (self-reported)								
Lack of transportation	190	52%	17	44%	116	30%	949	35%
Lack of housing	106	29%	9	23%	136	35%	694	25%
Lack of employment opportunities	75	20%	5	13%	28	7%	215	8%
Lack of child care	62	17%	6	15%	51	13%	275	10%
Criminal history	47	13%	8	21%	51	13%	396	14%
Lack of job experience/history	50	14%	3	8%	54	14%	366	13%
Monthly income								
Mean (average)	\$515		\$528		\$364		\$517	
Median (midpoint)	\$400		\$407		\$205		\$411	
Main source of income								
Steady employment	120	27%	12	25%	35	8%	747	21%
Day/temporary labor	47	11%	3	6%	42	10%	315	9%
MFIP (family welfare)	77	17%	9	19%	81	19%	510	14%
General Assistance	32	7%	7	15%	77	18%	622	18%
Tribal money	37	8%	5	10%	7	2%	1	<1%

	RESERVATION SURVEY				STATEWIDE HOMELESS SURVEY			
	Doubled up adults		Homeless adults		Adult Indians		Other adults	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Amount respondent could pay per month for housing								
\$0	105	25%	9	20%	127	30%	720	21%
\$1-\$199	81	19%	5	11%	103	24%	667	19%
\$200-\$399	129	30%	18	40%	88	21%	829	24%
\$400 or more	108	26%	13	29%	109	26%	1,228	36%
Chronic health condition	155	31%	14	34%	232	45%	1,852	44%
History suggests traumatic brain injury	97	19%	11	27%	208	40%	1,216	29%
Cognitive disability (problems with confusion, memory, or decision making)	69	14%	8	20%	175	34%	1,372	33%
Ever incarcerated	253	50%	26	63%	311	60%	1,926	46%
Substance abuse disorder								
Alcohol abuse disorder	69	14%	6	15%	184	36%	789	19%
Drug abuse disorder	42	8%	7	17%	113	22%	766	18%
Either of above	83	17%	9	22%	215	41%	1,079	26%
Considers self alcoholic or chemically dependent	138	28%	18	44%	261	52%	1,318	32%
Significant mental illness	113	22%	11	27%	292	56%	2,153	51%
Major depression	60	12%	9	23%	198	39%	1,474	36%
Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)	25	5%	5	12%	121	24%	749	18%
Women who are fleeing abuse	42	14%	6	16%	90	31%	621	32%
Respondents (of either gender) who have stayed in an abusive situation for lack of other housing	80	16%	12	29%	186	36%	1,347	33%
Physically abused as a child	83	17%	13	33%	233	46%	1,511	37%
Sexually abused as a child	51	10%	7	17%	166	33%	1,015	25%
Neglected as a child	71	14%	10	24%	174	34%	831	20%
Average number of nights in October spent...								
Doubled up	19 nights		6 nights		5 nights		3 nights	
Outside, car, etc.	1 night		3 nights		7 nights		3 nights	

	RESERVATION SURVEY				STATEWIDE HOMELESS SURVEY			
	Doubled up adults		Homeless adults		Adult Indians		Other adults	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Services used in October								
Food Stamps	219	37%	30	48%	286	55%	2,101	50%
Food shelf	183	31%	21	34%	246	47%	1,196	29%
Free medical clinic	168	28%	10	16%	145	28%	916	22%
WIC food program	134	23%	13	21%	73	14%	485	12%
Clothing shelf	85	14%	12	19%	249	48%	1,730	41%
Help to find a job	85	14%	10	16%	80	15%	761	18%
Free dental clinic	76	13%	6	10%	41	8%	333	8%
Transportation	53	9%	15	24%	211	41%	1,600	38%
Public benefits received in last 12 months								
Public medical benefits	306	52%	42	69%	367	71%	2,933	70%
Food Stamps	257	43%	34	56%	311	60%	2,449	59%
WIC food program	144	24%	14	23%	101	19%	588	14%
M FIP (family welfare)	141	24%	21	34%	130	25%	971	23%
SSI (disability)	41	7%	5	9%	75	15%	532	13%
Earned Income Tax Credit	28	5%	1	2%	33	6%	347	8%
Public benefits lost in last 12 months^(b)								
Public medical benefits	48	16%	6	14%	66	18%	418	14%
Food stamps	34	13%	2	6%	59	19%	467	19%
M FIP (family welfare)	80	57%	14	67%	47	36%	385	40%
WIC food program	9	6%	1	7%	9	9%	50	9%
Main housing barriers (self-report)								
Lack of job or income	187	45%	16	36%	203	47%	1,512	44%
No affordable housing	155	37%	8	18%	135	31%	1,048	31%
Criminal background	47	11%	7	16%	78	18%	546	16%
Cost of application fees	41	10%	4	9%	42	10%	277	8%
No local rental history	39	9%	4	9%	52	12%	241	7%

Notes: (a) Numbers and percents may not include all adults surveyed because not all respondents answered every question.

(b) For public benefits lost in last 12 months, percents are shown as a proportion of adults who had received the benefit.



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Learn more:

- Pearce, D.M. (1995). "Living on the Edge: Doubled-up families in America." *Poverty & Race* (May/June 1995). Washington, DC: Poverty & Race Research Action Council. www.prrac.org

- National American Indian Housing Council. (2001). *Too few rooms: Residential crowding in Native American communities and Alaska Native villages*. Washington, DC: Author. www.naihc.net

Learn more about the reservation study:

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2006 study:

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Indian reservations**

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