

Basic Needs – Food, Clothing, Rent & Utilities



This document provides an update to information in the *Community Action Network Basic Needs Assessment* report released in August of 1999.

Highlights

Unemployment Rate Highest in 11 Years

For the first time in many years, we have seen unemployment in Travis County climb steadily, from just 2.2% in January of 2001 to 5.7% in January of 2002, the highest rate in more than 11 years.

Calls for Basic Needs Assistance Increasing

In a comparison of October 2001 through January 22, 2002 and the same time period of the previous year, United Way Capital Area's First Call for Help has experienced a 28% increase in the number of callers. People needing help to pay electricity bills increased 113%. In addition, First Call for Help saw a 32% increase in calls for rent assistance, a 97% increase in calls for affordable housing assistance, and an 88% increase in calls for assistance with food (see chart on page 2).

Top Community Needs

At First Call for Help, the top five caller needs in FY 2000 - 2001 were: 1)Utility Bill Assistance; 2)Rent Assistance; 3)Food Pantry; 4)Homeless Shelter; and 5)Low-cost/ Affordable Housing.

Local food banks have experienced a 29% increase in demand in recent months.

Overview

Angelou Economic Advisors reports **more than 23,000 layoffs in Austin during 2001**. Based on the number of people in Travis County who have been laid off in 2001, it is estimated that **19,550 people have lost their health insurance benefits**.

Information recently released by the Center for Public Policy Priorities indicates that a single adult with no children needs to earn at least \$10/hour in order to secure basic necessities. However, **a single parent with one child needs to earn a minimum of \$17/hour to support a family (\$33,819/yr)**. For a family of two parents and two children, the Austin-San Marcos MSA is the most expensive metropolitan area in the state in which to live. **Of the top ten occupational categories in the Austin-San Marcos Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA), 28.8% of those jobs (186,360) have a median hourly wage of less than \$10/hour.**

Frequently Asked Questions about Basic Needs

Job loss can create a domino effect for individuals and families who are marginally self-sufficient. It can force choices between necessities such as buying food and paying other bills such as rent, utilities and medical care. For families with little or no savings or other financial cushion, a job loss by itself or combined with another emergency, such as a medical need, can have dire consequences such as family being forced onto the streets.

For all of these reasons, Austin area service providers are seeing a tremendous increase in demand for Basic Needs Services.

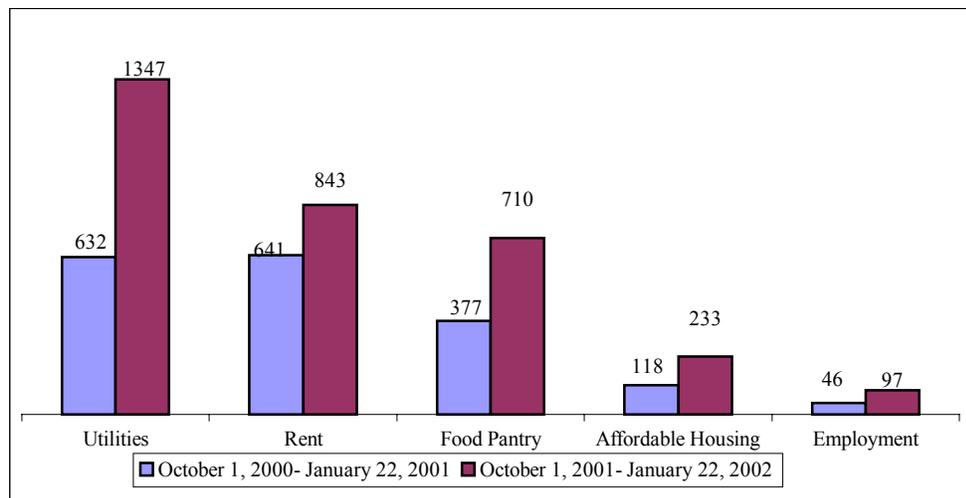
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q. What is the definition of Basic Needs?

- Basic Needs is defined as **food, clothing and housing** (rent, mortgage, utility) **assistance**. While there are a wide range of other services and supports that may be essential for an individual to reach self-sufficiency (child care, affordable housing, health care, education, transportation, to name a few), this document is focused on assistance to meet immediate crisis situations.

Q: How large is the demand for Basic Needs services?

- In a comparison of October 2001 through January 22, 2002 and the same time period of the previous year, **United Way's First Call for Help has experienced a 28% increase in the number of callers. People needing help to pay electricity bills increased 113%**. In addition, First Call for Help saw a **32% increase in calls for rent assistance, a 97% increase in calls for affordable housing assistance, and an 88% increase in calls for assistance with food (see chart).**



- At First Call for Help, the top five caller needs in FY 2000 - 2001 were: 1)Utility Bill Assistance; 2)Rent Assistance; 3)Food Pantry; 4)Homeless Shelter; and 5)Low-cost/ Affordable Housing.**
- Local food banks have experienced a 29% increase in demand in recent months.**

Frequently Asked Questions about Basic Needs

Q: Who needs Basic Needs services in the Austin/ Travis County area?

- Travis County Department of Human Services estimates that **there are up to 200,000 working poor in Travis County** (defined as living at or below 200% of the federal poverty income guideline, or \$36,200/year for a family of four).
- Another indicator of the magnitude of the “working poor” in Travis County is the number of students who are considered economically disadvantaged. Students are considered economically disadvantaged when they qualify for free or reduced-price lunch. In the seven school districts serving Travis County exclusively, 42.2% of all students qualified during the 2000-01 School Year. Del Valle (63.9%), Manor (57.5%), and Austin (48%) exceeded the county-wide rate. In these seven districts, 48% of elementary school students qualified for free or reduced price lunches.
- According to Census Bureau estimates released in 1999, 12.9% of the Travis County population lived at or below the poverty level in 1995. **Based on 2000 Census Data, more than 105,000 people in Travis County are living in poverty, (defined for a family of four as \$17,050).**
- The table below demonstrates **how much it costs to live in the Austin-San Marcos MSA.**

Austin-San Marcos MSA—Family Security Index*

	One Adult No Children	Single Parent One Child	Single Parent Two Children	Single Parent Three Children	Two Parents Two Children	Two Parents Three Children
Typical Monthly Expenses						
Housing	\$533	\$858	\$858	\$1192	\$858	\$1,192
Food	\$147	\$206	\$295	\$361	\$418	\$484
Child Care		\$366	\$569	\$978	\$569	\$978
Medical	\$281	\$460	\$460	\$460	\$727	\$727
Transportation	\$278	\$278	\$278	\$278	\$391	\$391
Other Necessities	\$177	\$294	\$294	\$351	\$321	\$383
Tax Payments & Credits	\$247	\$356	\$306	\$514	\$386	\$517
Total Income Needed to Survive in Austin						
Monthly	\$1,663	\$2,818	\$3,061	\$4,132	\$3,670	\$4,672
Annual	\$19,953	\$33,819	\$36,729	\$49,590	\$44,044	\$56,058
Hourly	\$10	\$17	\$18	\$25	\$22	\$28
% of Federal Poverty Level	223%	285%	265%	283%	252%	273%

Source: Making It: What it Really Takes to Live in Texas. Center for Public Policy Priorities, November 8, 2001.

*Estimates for all categories are conservative, and tend to underestimate actual monthly expenses.

Frequently Asked Questions about Basic Needs

Q: How often can people access Basic Needs Services, and what is the average amount of assistance?

- For the two major Basic Needs Services providers in Travis County (Caritas and Travis County Health & Human Services Department), clients are only eligible for services **once every 12 months**. The average amount of rent and utility assistance provided is **approximately \$150 to \$200 per family**.
- Income eligibility guidelines for the Travis County program are generally 50% of poverty (an annual income of \$9,050 for a family of four). Exceptions are made for the elderly and disabled. Caritas serves those with incomes up to 100% of poverty (\$18,100 for a family of four).

Q: What can I do to help?

- Contact the United Way Capital Area's Volunteer Center at 512-323-1898 or search for volunteer opportunities on United Way Capital Area's website at www.uway-austin.org.
- Please see the CAN Urgent Issues Action Plan at www.caction.org for additional information about Community-Wide approaches to addressing Basic Needs in our community.

Additional Information

To access the 1999 CAN Community Basic Needs Assessment refer to: www.caction.org. To obtain a copy of this or any other CAN report, please visit the CAN offices, email Brenda Ahrns at bahrns@austin.isd.tenet.edu, call 512-414-8203, or write to The Community Action Network, 1111 W. 6th Street, Suite B220, Austin, Texas 78703.

For regularly updated current statistics across all issue areas please see *The CAN Community Overview* document at www.caction.org.

For information on available basic needs services, refer to United Way's First Call for Help at 512-324-1899 or their online database at <http://www.uway-austin.org/gethelp/index.htm>

This FAQ was created by members of the following organizations:

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Any Baby Can
The ARC of the Capital Area
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