



This document provides an update to the information in the Community Action Network Homelessness Community Assessment Report released in October 2001.

Highlights

Families Comprise Over 40% of the Homeless

Nearly 4,000 people are homeless in Travis County on any given day. Over the period of a year, it is estimated that between 16,000 – 20,000 residents experience homelessness. Families comprise over 40% of the homeless and are the fastest growing population of homeless in our community. An estimated 1 out of every 4 homeless persons is a child.

Homelessness Caused by Poverty and Costly Housing

The primary causes of homelessness are poverty and the lack of affordable housing. Approximately 133,408 people in Travis County live in poverty. Between 5% and 10% of poor people will experience homelessness. Housing costs have increased more than 70% since 1990, making Austin the most expensive housing market in Texas. Low-wage earners and persons on fixed incomes are disproportionately affected.

Family Violence and Lack of Family Support Contribute to Homelessness

Over 30% of homeless persons in Travis County are victims of family violence. Nationally, 26% of homeless persons report being removed from their home as a child and placed in foster care or an institution. Locally, 28% of homeless youth indicate they were abused, abandoned, or pushed out of their homes before their 17th birthday; over 50% report a history of sexual abuse.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q: Who is homeless in Travis County?

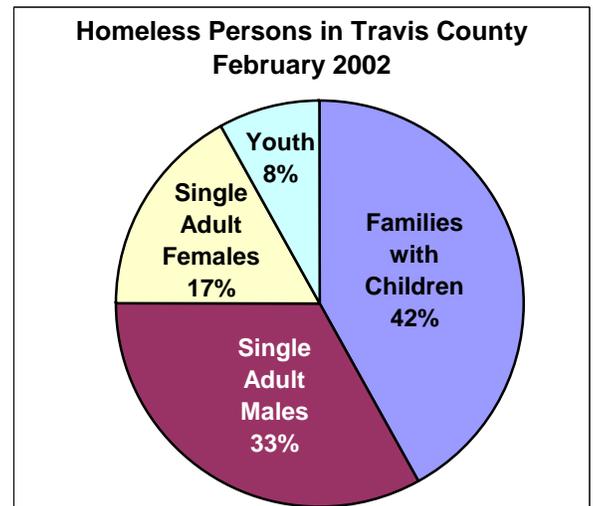
Nearly **4,000 persons** are homeless in Travis County on any given day. Over the course of a year, it is estimated that between 16,000 – 20,000 **experience homelessness**. There are several sub-populations of homeless persons, including: families with children, single adults, youth, persons with disabilities, elderly, and veterans. People in **families comprise over 40% of the homeless and are the fastest growing sub-population of homeless**.

Q. What is homelessness?

People are homeless if they live in:

- Places not meant for habitation, including: cars, parks, abandoned buildings, the streets
- An emergency shelter, transitional housing program, or a weekly motel
- A temporary, unstable “doubled up” arrangement with friends or family members

Additionally, many are discharged from an institution (hospital, jail, mental health facility) with no resources to obtain housing



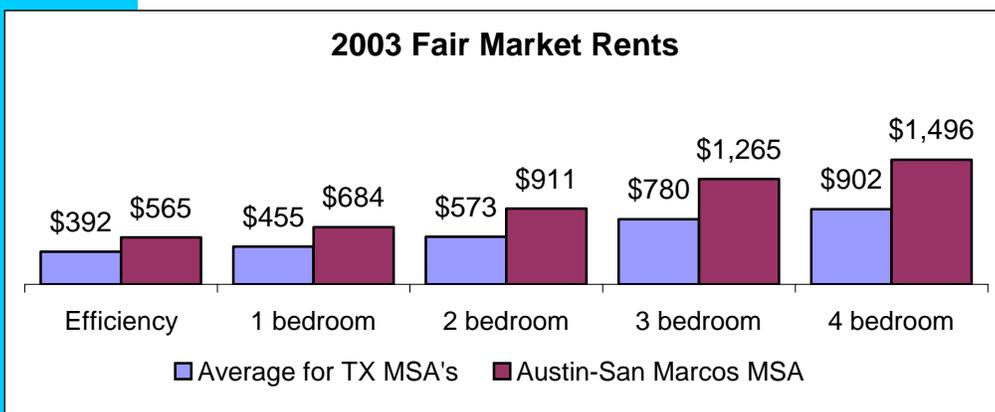
Source: Community Action Network Homeless Task Force

Frequently Asked Questions about Homelessness

Q. How do people become homeless?

Homelessness is primarily caused by **poverty and the lack of affordable housing**; the current levels of housing costs, coupled with low-wage jobs and the recent economic downturn, push even the working poor out of their homes.

- Sudden loss of income leads to: many people becoming homeless, layoffs, divorce/loss of spouse, lack of benefits, loss of work due to caring for a sick child
- The local unemployment rate increased drastically from 2.2% in January 2001 to 6.2% in September 2002, **the highest unemployment rate in 12 years**



Austin rents have increased 62% since 1990 and home prices have increased 113%, making Austin the most expensive housing market in Texas

Although occupancy rates in the rental market have decreased from an average 98% in 2000 to 91% in September 2002, this trend has yet to reduce middle and low-end rents

Source: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, October 2002

Individual circumstances that increase a person's vulnerability to homelessness include family violence, mental or physical disabilities, addiction issues, and lack of support after foster care:

- Over 30% of homeless persons in Travis County are **victims of family violence (Austin/Travis County Annual Homeless Providers Survey, Feb. 2002)**
- Approximately **27% of homeless youth have been in foster care**; 28% indicate they were abused, abandoned, or pushed out of their homes (Urban Institute); 50% report having been sexually abused (CAN Homeless Assessment, October 2001)
- Approximately 25% of homeless persons are affected by severe mental illness; nearly 18% have chronic substance abuse issues; over 13% suffer from both mental illness and addiction
- 1/3 of single adult men who are homeless are veterans (Homeless in America, 1996)

Q. What is the impact of homelessness?

- On average, homeless families experience homelessness once or twice, for less than a year; families tend to enter and exit homelessness relatively quickly (Urban Institute)
- Homeless families are typically headed by a young single mother with 2 to 3 children, who did not finish high school or is unemployed; 42% of homeless children are age six or younger (**Austin/Travis County Annual Homeless Providers Survey, Feb. 2002**)
- Homeless children suffer more health problems than housed children: 38% of children in homeless shelters have asthma, middle ear infection prevalence is 50% higher than the national average, and over 60% of homeless children are under-vaccinated (Redlener & Johnson, 1999) Homelessness often precludes good nutrition; homeless children often experience physical and mental development delays
- Nearly one-fifth of homeless children repeat a grade in school and 16% are enrolled in special education classes – rates 100% and 33% higher than housed children; much of this is due to their high mobility rate (Institute for Children & Poverty, 2001)

Frequently Asked Questions about Homelessness



Homeless single adults are more visible and more likely to live on the streets, experiencing longer or more frequent spells of homelessness

Homeless adults:

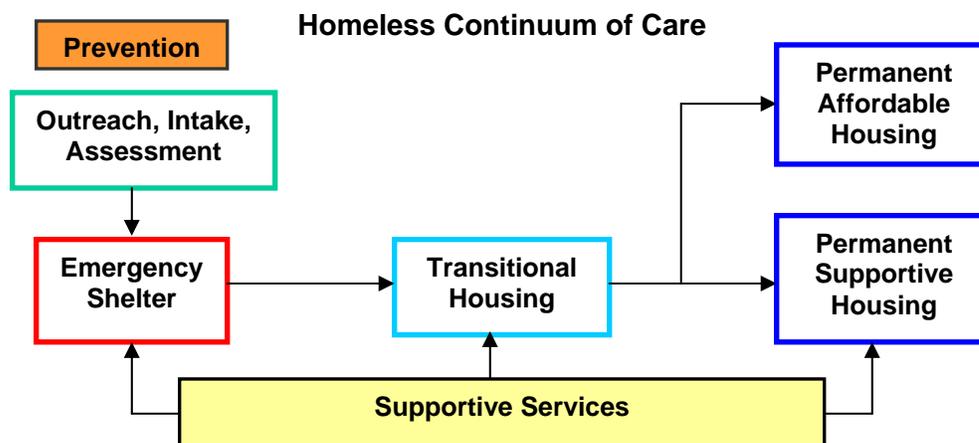
- Suffer chronic physical health conditions such as tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS, diabetes and hypertension, at a much higher rate than housed individuals; treatment is difficult without a stable living environment
- Utilize public services (e.g. hospital emergency rooms, mental health facilities, jails) more frequently
- Usually experience higher rates of violence and victimization

Q. What challenges do people face when trying to resolve homelessness?

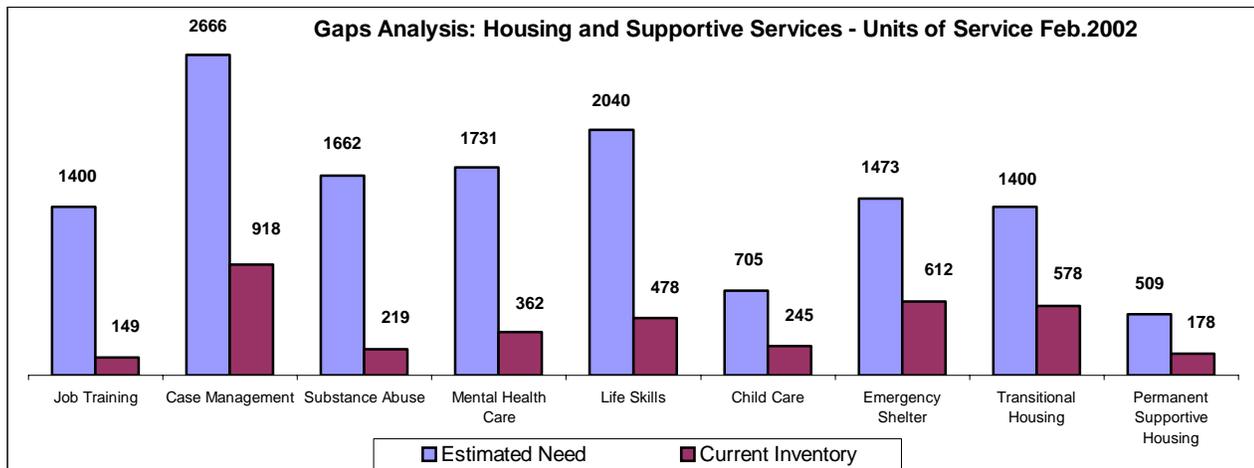
- A single adult with no children needs to earn **at least \$10/hour** in order to secure basic necessities; a single parent with one child needs to earn a minimum of **\$17/hour**
- Of the top ten occupational categories in the Austin area, nearly 30% of those jobs have a median wage of **less than \$10/hour**
- According to the 2000 U.S. Census, approximately **21% of residents could not afford** Austin's median rent of \$764 and 43% could not afford to purchase a median priced home (\$140,422)
- Over **8,000 families are on waiting lists for subsidized housing** (H.A.C.A April 2002)
- **Criminal backgrounds, poor credit histories**, and unresolved debts can block access to housing
- Families **without access to affordable child care** or reliable transportation have greater difficulty moving towards self-sufficiency
- Overall, the cost of living in Austin presents the greatest challenge. The Center for Public Policy Priorities found that **no family in the Austin MSA can live on less than 200% of federal poverty income guidelines (\$36,200 for a family of four) without serious financial challenges.**

Q. What's being done now to address homelessness in our community?

Homeless services in Austin/Travis County are conceptualized as a continuum of care: a comprehensive and coordinated housing and service delivery system. This framework helps our community provide a balance of emergency, transitional, and permanent housing and critical services to successfully support families', and individuals' transition out of homelessness. Prevention services are also a critical component of the continuum of care. Although resources have increased over the past decade, significant gaps in services for homeless people remain.



Frequently Asked Questions about Homelessness



Source: Community Action Network Homeless Task Force

As the local economy constricts and more people become jobless or underemployed, the demand for emergency shelter, transitional housing, and affordable rental units continues to increase faster than the supply. The expansion of prevention efforts, increased availability of jobs with living wage levels, and further development of affordable housing initiatives, such as the Housing Trust Fund, are critically needed to reduce homelessness in Austin.

Q: What can I do to help?

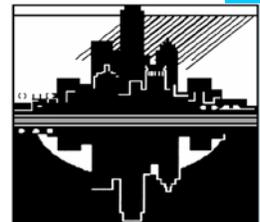
- Support local, state, and national housing trust fund, affordable housing and living wage initiatives
- Volunteer at a local homeless organization: Contact the United Way Capital Area's Volunteer Center at 512-323-1898 or search for volunteer opportunities at www.unitedwaycapitalarea.org
- Please see the CAN Urgent Issues Action Plan at www.caction.org for additional information about community-wide approaches to address Homelessness in our community

This FAQ was created by members of the Community Action Network (CAN) Homeless Task Force.

For information about this document, please contact Mary Rychlik at Austin/Travis County Health and Human Services Department (512) 972-5027 or Mary.Rychlik@ci.austin.tx.us

Additional Information

To access the 2001 Community Action Network Homelessness Community Assessment Report and information about the Homeless Task Force, refer to <http://www.caction.org>. To order a copy of this or any other CAN report, please call 414-8203 or e-mail bahrns@austin.isd.tenet.edu



Other helpful websites:

National Alliance to End Homelessness	http://www.endhomelessness.org
National Coalition for the Homeless	http://www.nationalhomeless.org
Urban Institute	http://www.urban.org
Texas Homeless Network	http://www.thn.org
Texas Low-income Housing Information Service	http://www.texashousing.org
Center for Public Policy Priorities	http://www.cppp.org
Universal Living Wage Campaign	http://www.universallivingwage.org
CTOSH	http://communication.utexas.edu/faculty/ctosh

CAN Partners: Austin Area Research Organization ~ Austin Independent School District ~ Austin Area Human Services Association ~ Austin Area Interreligious Ministries ~ Austin Travis County MHMR Center ~ Capital Metro ~ City of Austin ~ Community Justice Council ~ Greater Austin Chamber of Commerce ~ Health Partnership 2010 ~ Higher Education Coalition ~ Travis County ~ United Way Capital Area ~ WorkSource- Greater Austin Area Workforce Board