



Photo by Chuck Cherny, Chicago Tribune

Homelessness: *The Causes and the Facts*

Over the course of a year, between 2.3 and 3.5 million people experience homelessness nationwide¹ and approximately 166,000 people experience homelessness in the Chicago Metropolitan area.²

The causes of homelessness are multiple and complex. There is often a lot of focus on personal problems which can be contributing factors, but do not alone cause homelessness. There is the larger systemic problem that our economic and political systems fail to promote justice and equality. Furthermore, there is institutionalized racism, sexism and other forms of discrimination which create barriers to economic advancement. This fact sheet illustrates some of the tangible results of these larger systemic issues including severe shortages of affordable housing, living-wage jobs and health care and supportive services.

Unfortunately, the economic and political climate is getting worse, not better for those who are homeless and at-risk of homelessness. As the economy struggles to recover, job opportunities remain scarce, increasing the hardship faced by many vulnerable populations. Federal funding for programs serving these populations is decreasing demonstrating the unwillingness of our society to end homelessness.

By educating people about the facts behind the problem and committing to the belief that housing is a human right in a just society, we can cultivate the political will needed to end homelessness.

Lack of Affordable Housing

NATIONAL

■ In the U.S., nearly a third of all households spend 30 percent or more of their income on housing and 13 percent spend 50 percent or more.³

■ About 6.1 million households live in overcrowded conditions.⁴

■ There is not a single jurisdiction in the country where a person working full time earning the prevailing minimum wage can afford a two-bedroom rental apartment.⁵

ILLINOIS

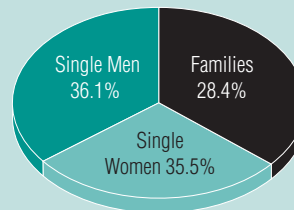
■ Overall, 78 percent of low-income households in Illinois have housing problems; 72 percent have cost burdens over 30 percent; 54 percent are extremely cost burdened, paying more than 50 percent of household income for housing.⁶

■ There are 77,041 households on public housing waiting lists across Illinois, 73 percent of which are in Chicago. This is more than the total number of public housing units in Illinois: 68,845.⁷

■ Of the estimated 32,000 migrant workers who come into Illinois each year to harvest fruits and vegetables and handle other seasonal jobs, each is likely to earn less than \$10,000. Yet many families pay as much as 70 percent of income for housing.⁸

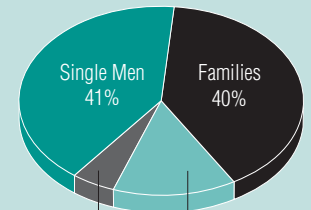
Family Status of Homeless Households

Chicago



Youth: of the above, 3.5% are unaccompanied youth

National



Youth 5%
Single Women 14%

Note: The percentage of Chicago homeless families is lower than in previous years because the City of Chicago is now including a count of homeless people on the street as well as in homeless shelters.

Source: U.S. Conference of Mayors Hunger and Homelessness Survey, 2004 and Chicago Department of Human Services, 2004

■ Twenty-three percent of all white households, 42 percent of all black households, and 53 percent of all Hispanic households have a housing problem.⁹

CHICAGO REGION

■ In most Chicago communities in the 1990s, rents rose faster than incomes despite the fact that, on the whole, Chicago's median income rose faster than rent.¹⁰

■ Nearly one-third of Chicago renters were paying more than 35 percent of their income for housing in 2000; another 20 percent were paying more than half.¹¹

■ Compared with Boston, Los Angeles, New York, and Washington, DC, Chicago saw the highest percentage change in median rent (28 percent) from 1990 to 2000.¹²

■ The Chicago region is not adding new housing where it is adding new jobs. The communities that added the most jobs between 1990 and 2000 added only a fraction as much housing.¹³

■ Compared to 10 other major U.S. cities, Chicago had the lowest percentage increase (8 percent) in rental units between 1970 and 2000, which is less than half of the next lowest ranking city, New York (19 percent).¹⁴

Continued on page 2

Continued from page 1

■ Since 1995, 16,068 units of public housing have been demolished, and only 1,296 new units have been created.¹⁵

■ The wait for Section 8 vouchers in Chicago is 84 months. The waiting list for housing choice vouchers has been closed in Chicago since 1997 and is not expected to open again until 2005 at the earliest.¹⁶

■ In Chicago, only 10 percent of affordable-housing need is met.¹⁷

Lack of Living-Wage Jobs/Income Support

LOW WAGES

■ Nearly half of Illinois residents earn \$25,000 a year or less.¹⁸

■ According to the 2001 Illinois self-sufficiency standard, a family of one adult and two children would need to earn \$38,281 a year to pay for all their living expenses without any government assistance. (Living expenses include housing, childcare, food, transportation, healthcare, etc.)¹⁹

■ In Illinois, nearly 100,000 working families are living in poverty. One in four working families is classified as low-income.²⁰

■ According to a recent study conducted by local universities, 75 percent of the city's working-poor families earned less than \$13,001, the income required to support a one-person family above 150 percent of the poverty line.²¹

UNEMPLOYMENT/ UNDEREMPLOYMENT

■ The official U.S. unemployment rate for November 2004 was 5.4 percent. Breaking that down, African Americans had the highest unemployment rate of 10.8 percent, versus 4.7 percent of whites.²²

■ For August 2004, hidden unemployment statistics show 4.5 million people worked part-time because they could not find full-time work. An additional 4.9 million people who wanted jobs were not counted because they were not looking during the reference week. Adding this to official unemployment statistics totals over 17

Latino Homelessness

In the city of Chicago, Latinos have had the largest population growth of any race or ethnic group. Latino population increased by over 200,000 between 1990 and 2000, from 19.6 percent of the population to 26 percent.⁴⁶ More than 55 percent of Latinos in Chicago are renting, and they live disproportionately in the city's oldest housing.⁴⁷ Twenty-four percent of Latino families live below the poverty level and on average spend 59 percent of their income for rent.⁴⁸ Many primarily Latino communities such as Logan Square and Humboldt Park are rapidly gentrifying, pushing Latino families out.

Because Latino families often live in extremely overcrowded conditions before resorting to the shelter system, they tend to be underrepresented in counts of homeless people on the street or in shelters. Between 1990 and 2000, three Chicago neighborhoods—Archer Heights, West Elsdon, and West Lawn—saw a threefold to sixfold increase in Latino population. Those same neighborhoods saw a 200-406 percent increase in overcrowded households, defined as households with more than one person per room (not bedroom) in the apartment.⁴⁹

million people unemployed or underemployed, which is 11.4 percent of the labor force.²³

■ One of every two workers nationally does not find a job by the time unemployment insurance runs out.²⁴

■ Illinois's long-term unemployment rate is 20 percent; 80,000 people have been unemployed for at least six months.²⁵

WAGE DISPARITY

■ Women make 76 cents for every dollar that men earn. African American women earn 65 percent and Latina women earn just 55 percent for every dollar their male counterparts earn.²⁶

POVERTY

■ The number of people in poverty dropped 6 percent citywide between 1990 and 2000. But this does not mean fewer people were in poverty everywhere: more than half of Chicago's communities saw the number of people in poverty rise, and in many cases the number rose dramatically—by 25 to as much as 142 percent.²⁷

LACK OF JOBS

■ In 2002, 64,500 jobs were lost. Illinois led the nation in job losses.²⁸

EDUCATIONAL BARRIERS

■ By 2006, nearly two-thirds of all jobs in the United States will require workers to have some education beyond high school, even for jobs at the

Prison Release and Homelessness

Every day, people are released from prison without a place to live. Reentry without adequate discharge planning can lead to devastating consequences, including homelessness. In 2003, 34,491 individuals were released in Illinois alone.³⁰ The majority of formerly incarcerated individuals are released without savings or immediate benefits and may experience interruptions in mental health or substance abuse treatment.³¹

Barriers to housing and employment exacerbate this plight. Formerly incarcerated

individuals living on the streets or in shelters do not have an address or place for employers to contact them. Likewise, many private-housing markets exclude ex-offenders because of their criminal history and employment requirements. Federal law can bar ex-prisoners from public housing and federally funded assisted-housing programs, including Section 8 housing vouchers. Illinois public housing authorities make individual determinations on eligibility, based on criminal history, and can bar individuals from receiving public housing.³²

Prisoners released into poor, rural areas are plagued with additional challenges. Significant job losses in southern Illinois, for example, have increased the number of homeless people, and many former prisoners indicate they became homeless because they are unable to find work.³³ Rural homeless service providers state that parole restrictions require parolees to remain living in the region despite high unemployment and the lack of homeless shelters. In addition, earnings of workers in southern regions lag substantially behind those in urban areas.³⁴

entry level. By 2013, more than 80 percent of 23 million new jobs in this country will require some postsecondary education.²⁹

■ According to the Current Population Survey 2003, 14.1 percent of Illinois residents over the age of 25 do not have a high school diploma, and only 28.1 percent of Illinois residents have a college degree or higher.³⁰

■ In 2003, the Illinois Department of Corrections released 34,491 formerly incarcerated individuals back into communities across the state. Admissions testing suggests that approximately 45 percent of inmates read below the 6th-grade level, 60 percent below the 8th-grade level.³¹

PUBLIC BENEFITS

■ Since 1996, 187,000 welfare recipients in Illinois have left welfare for employment. Only 30 percent have secured and retained 30 hours of work and only 6 percent of those found “good jobs” (i.e., jobs that pay \$8 or more, offer benefits, and are day shift and not temporary or seasonal).³²

■ As a result of welfare reform there has been a troubling and steady increase (from 17 percent in 1999 to 37 percent in 2002) in the proportion of Illinois families who were relying upon neither work nor TANF to make ends meet but often instead on neighbors, family, and friends.³³

Lack of Healthcare and Supportive Services

HEALTHCARE

■ With an uninsured rate at 19.2 percent, children in poverty were more likely to be uninsured than all other children.³⁴

■ In 2003, 80 percent of people without health coverage were working families.³⁵

■ Nearly a third of persons living in poverty have no health insurance of any kind.³⁶

■ In 2001, 1,668,000 nonelderly Illinoisans were without health insurance.³⁷

MENTAL HEALTH

■ People with serious mental illnesses are overrepresented among the homeless population. Although only 4 percent of the U.S. population has a serious mental illness, five to six times as many people who are homeless (20-25 percent) have serious mental illnesses.³⁸

■ Homeless service providers reported in a survey of the Chicago region that 40% of homeless individuals did not have their mental health needs met.³⁹

SUBSTANCE ABUSE

■ More than half of the adults with co-occurring serious mental illness and a substance use disorder received neither specialty substance use treatment nor mental health treatment during the past year.⁴⁰

■ Substance abusers account for an estimated 30 percent of homeless people.⁴¹

Source: U.S. Conference of Mayor's Hunger and Homelessness Survey, 2004

Veterans and Homelessness

On any given night, almost 300,000 veterans experience homelessness nationwide,⁵⁵ a number far greater than the roughly 58,000 U.S. soldiers who died during the Vietnam War.⁵⁶ As many as 18,000 veterans are estimated to experience homelessness every night in the six counties of the Chicago metropolitan area.⁵⁷ More than 500,000 American veterans experience homelessness over the course of a year.⁵⁸

The vast majority of homeless veterans (76%) suffer from drug, alcohol, or mental health problems or some combination of these issues.⁵⁹

Programs serving homeless veterans are consistently underfunded. For example, according to the Department of Veteran Affairs (VA), only 100,000 veterans are served by homeless services and community-based programs, leaving 80 percent of the homeless veteran population without services. In Illinois, only 158 beds funded through the VA's Homeless Providers Grant and Per Diem Program are available for almost 20,000 homeless veterans.⁶⁰

Youth Homelessness

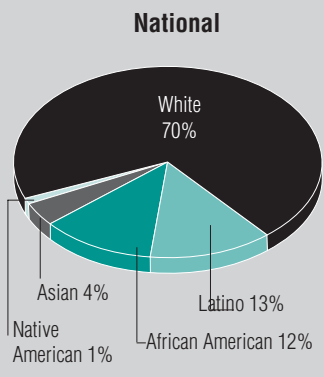
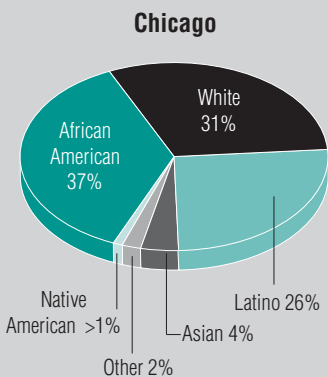
An estimated 26,000 youth experience homelessness in Illinois over the course of a year.⁶¹ Youth become homeless for a variety of reasons, including family conflict over sexual orientation, school, sexual activity, drug or alcohol use, and pregnancy.⁶² Rates of suicide, substance abuse, HIV, survival sex (sex for money, shelter, or food), anxiety and conduct disorders, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder are significantly higher for homeless and runaway youth than for nonhomeless youth.⁶³

Pregnant and parenting teens are especially vulnerable to becoming homeless. One survey found that 26 percent of pregnant and parenting teens in Illinois live in unstable or unsafe conditions, which puts these youth at serious risk of homelessness. In urban areas, this number jumps to 54 percent.⁶⁴

Another important issue is the outcomes of youth in foster care. A federal study of youth who had been in foster care found that one-fourth had experienced homelessness after leaving the foster care system.⁶⁵

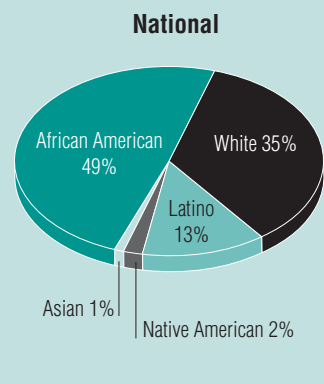
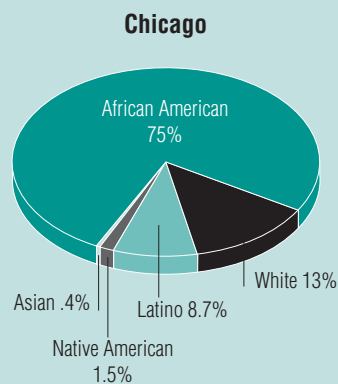
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Racial Demographics in General Population



Source: U.S. Census Data 2000

Racial Demographics in Homeless Population



Shelter Systems

■ According to the U.S. Conference of Mayor's Hunger and Homelessness Survey from 2004, requests for emergency shelters for families have increased 10 percent in Chicago. The Chicago Department of Human Services estimates that the number of requests for shelter for larger families may increase.⁴²

■ According to data from the Chicago Public Schools for November 2004, for every one homeless child living in a shelter four that are homeless are living doubled up with others. In 2003, the city reported that 17,299 people were served in city shelters. Likely, at least four times as many people were homeless that year.⁴³

■ The U.S. Conference of Mayor's Hunger and Homelessness Survey reports that 88 percent of participating cities expect that requests

for emergency shelter will increase next year, and 78 percent expect requests for shelter by homeless families will increase in 2005.⁴⁴

■ In fiscal year 2004, emergency shelters in Chicago served 13,108 unduplicated clients, up from 11,050 in fiscal year 2003.⁴⁵

Domestic Violence and Homelessness

Women who find themselves in domestic violence situations often need to flee quickly from their abuser. However, many become so isolated that they have nowhere to turn after they escape the abuse. Consequently, many victims of domestic violence end up homeless. In 2003, the Mayor's Office of Domestic Violence Help Line received 8,037 calls from victims of domestic violence. Of those, 42 percent (3,206) were seeking shelter, the most commonly requested service.⁶⁶

In Chicago in 2003, 56 percent of women in homeless shelters reported that they had been victims of domestic violence, and 22 percent stated that domestic violence was the immediate cause of their homelessness.⁶⁷ With a severe shortage of available beds in shelters, (only 154 domestic violence shelter beds in Chicago) many women face a choice of going back to their abuser or living on the streets. Even if a woman can get into a shelter, general homeless

shelters do not function as "safe houses," whose locations are kept confidential. Poor women seem especially vulnerable to domestic violence, their likelihood of being in a abusive situation being seven times that of women with a household income over \$75,000.⁶⁸ Further complicating matters, many landlords have adopted "zero tolerance for crime" policies that punish tenants when violence occurs in their homes, regardless of whether the tenant is the victim or the perpetrator.⁶⁹

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