

# FACTS ON HOMELESSNESS IN WASHINGTON, D.C.

## OVERVIEW

- An estimated 18,500 people are homeless in Washington, D.C. over the course of a year, which is 3.2% of the District's population<sup>1</sup> – one of the highest rates in the country. On an average day in 2006, approximately 9,369 persons in the District of Columbia were homeless or receiving homeless services, a 13% increase since 2004.<sup>2</sup> 46% of these individuals are “chronically homeless,” meaning they have been homeless for more than a year.<sup>3</sup>
- In the D.C. metropolitan region, 51% of area's total homeless population resides in Washington, more than in all of the surrounding MD and VA counties combined.<sup>4</sup>
- There are only approximately 2,000 emergency shelter beds available year-round for single adults in D.C., and 171 emergency shelter units for families.<sup>5</sup>
- The number of homeless **families** seeking shelter in DC more than doubled over the last five years – increasing from 1,276 families in fiscal year 2000 to 2,839 families in fiscal year 2006.<sup>6</sup> In 2006, families made up 33% of Washington, D.C.'s homeless population.<sup>7</sup>
- The wait for *emergency family* shelter is at least 6 months, and only 11% of the homeless families that applied in 2006 were placed in family shelter.<sup>8</sup>
- In 2004, approximately 16% of the District's poor experienced being homeless at some time during the year.<sup>9</sup>
- Two large downtown-D.C. emergency shelters for men closed in 2004, Gales and Randall, and were replaced by shelters in far more inaccessible locations in the city, creating significant challenges for the single men's homeless population.
- “Hate crimes” targeted at homeless individuals are on the increase, according to the National Coalition for the Homeless. Between 1999 and 2006, 614 acts of violence were committed against people experiencing homelessness, 189 of which were fatal. In 2006 alone there were 142 documented attacks and 20 deaths due to hate crimes against the homeless.<sup>10</sup>
- D.C. Human Services funding cuts have resulted in a reduction in homeless services funding since the 1990s, including a decline of more than 80% in the number of apartment-style shelter units for homeless families, elimination of a program that provided emergency assistance to 13,000 families and individuals, and a 40% reduction in the value of cash assistance for families with children, after adjusting for inflation.<sup>11</sup>

## WHY ARE SO MANY PEOPLE HOMELESS?

- Washington, D.C. has the 4<sup>th</sup> highest poverty rate in the country, 17.7% overall in 2005.<sup>12</sup> 36% of children in D.C. lived below the poverty line in 2003, up from 30% in 2002, compared with a child poverty rate of 18% nationally.<sup>13,14</sup>
- More than 1 out of 4 – 26.9% – of DC families with children live at or below the poverty line. This is the highest rate of family poverty in the nation.<sup>15</sup>
- Washington, D.C. has the widest income gap between rich and poor of any city in the country, with the poorest fifth of D.C. residents earning an average of \$6,126 a year, while the richest fifth earn an average of 31 times that much, \$186,830.<sup>16</sup>
- From 2003 to 2005, salaries in the range of \$20,000 rose only 5.4 percent, not enough to keep up with rising prices, but for jobs that pay \$60,000 or more, salaries rose 12.4 percent, well above the 6.8 inflation rate.<sup>17</sup>
- The unemployment rate in D.C. was 5.5% as of March 2007, notably higher than the 4.4% national rate for the same time period.<sup>18</sup> Homeless individuals with no phone or address stand a slim chance competing for jobs in an already tight job market.
- It has been estimated that a two-parent, two-child family needs \$59,942 a year to live in the District,<sup>19</sup> yet the official poverty line for a family of four is \$20,650.<sup>20</sup>
- As of 2004, the District had an estimated 79,000 residents who were uninsured, most of whom work in low-paying jobs without employer-sponsored health insurance.<sup>21</sup>
- For the year 2006, the Fair Market Rent (FMR) for an *efficiency* apartment in Washington, D.C. is \$948 a month. The FMR for a 1-bedroom unit is \$1080; 2-bedroom, \$1225; 3-bedroom, \$1580; and 4-bedroom, \$2068.<sup>22</sup>
- A 2005 DCFPI analysis showed that nearly 12,000 affordable housing units in the District were replaced by almost 15,000 high-cost units in 2004. Median rent prices increased by 9 percent and median home prices by 32 percent between 2003 and 2004.<sup>23</sup> From 2003 to 2005, 8,646 housing units with gross rents under \$999 were lost in DC.<sup>24</sup>
- In the District of Columbia, a worker earning the Minimum Wage (\$7.00 per hour) must work approximately 141 hours per week in order to afford a two-bedroom unit at the area's Fair Market rent. Put differently, a full time minimum wage worker with 2 children only earns 28% of the income necessary to pay average monthly living expenses.<sup>25</sup>
- The Housing Wage in the District of Columbia is \$24.73, which is 3.5 times greater than the minimum wage. This is the amount a full time (40 hours per week) worker must earn per hour in order to afford a two-bedroom unit at the area's Fair Market rent.<sup>26</sup>

- TANF (formerly AFDC), the cash welfare program for families, was increased in 2006 for the first time in *twenty years*. The new benefit levels, 1 person--\$257; 2--\$320; 3--\$407; 4--\$498; 5--\$573; 6--\$674; 7--\$773; 8--\$855; 9--\$940, are still far below the amount needed to afford housing and other essentials in the District of Columbia. Yet, there are more than 16,000 families who receive TANF in the District, including 30,000 children.<sup>27</sup>
- The maximum amount of Food Stamps available in the District is \$155/month for 1 person; \$284/month for 2 persons; and \$408/month for 3 persons. For those who get TANF or other cash assistance, the amounts are even less.<sup>28</sup>
- The amount of the monthly grant for Social Security's SSI Disability program is \$623 for 2007. It takes an average of 2 years after applying to obtain these benefits, and the only temporary source of income in D.C. for single, disabled adults in the meantime is Interim Disability Assistance (IDA), which pays only \$257/month.
- 80% of households in the Washington area with annual incomes under \$10,000 and 50% of households with incomes under \$35,000 are paying rents that are "unaffordable," with households earning less than \$8,500/year spending over 80% of their income on housing.<sup>29</sup>
- At least 63,000 D.C. residents -more than one in nine – are addicted to drugs or alcohol, double the national addiction rate.<sup>30</sup> Yet the budget for D.C.'s Addiction Prevention and Recovery Administration was cut by \$3 million in 2003, decreased an additional \$2 million between 2003 and 2005, and received a net cut of 4.4% between 2007 & 2008.<sup>31</sup> There are long waits to get into detox or the few residential treatment beds which exist; as a result, D.C. assists only 14% of its addicts.<sup>32</sup>
- While the District spends approximately \$42.45 per capita on drug and alcohol prevention and treatment, it spends \$1,257 per capita on criminal justice efforts.<sup>33</sup> In a nine-city survey of supportive housing and jail costs, jail cots were on average two to three times the cost of supportive housing.<sup>34</sup>
- Washington, D.C. leads the U.S. in per capita incarceration, and at least one third of the D.C. Detention Center's approximately 3,500 inmates suffer from severe mental illness, for which they often do not receive adequate treatment.<sup>35</sup> Nationally, mentally ill state prison inmates are more than twice as likely as other inmates to report living on the street or in a shelter within the last 12 months.<sup>36</sup>
- Incarceration makes it more likely that a person will end up homeless, due to separation from social networks, lack of adequate medical and mental health treatment, and failure to provide adequate discharge planning, according to a 2005 study published in the American Journal of Public Health.<sup>37</sup>
- 383,000 people were served by the Capital Area Food Bank in 2005, a 39% increase from 2001. 50% of the people seeking food support in the area had jobs.<sup>38</sup>

## WHO IS HOMELESS?

- In the D.C. Metropolitan Area, approximately 26% of all homeless people are mentally ill, 30% are substance abusers, 10% are physically disabled, and 9% are veterans.<sup>39</sup>
- 19% of single homeless individuals and 31% of adults in homeless families in Washington, D.C. are employed.<sup>40</sup>
- Families represent 33% of DC's homeless population. Among the homeless singles population, men account for 82% of those in shelter, and women 18%.<sup>41</sup>
- In Washington, D.C., 82% of homeless people are African American, 5% are Caucasian, 12% are Hispanic, and 1% are Asian.<sup>42</sup>
- At least 40% of homeless families in the D.C. area have been homeless more than once.<sup>43</sup>
- An estimated 50% of all persons in families in the District shelter system have experienced domestic violence.<sup>44</sup>
- The percentage of homeless individuals in Washington, D.C. who suffer from mental illness and/or substance abuse is approximately 70%. The percentage of homeless persons in families who suffer from mental illness and/or substance abuse is around 53%.<sup>45</sup>
- The District is paying at least \$4.3 million a year to incarcerate and “treat” a minimum of 100 mentally ill homeless persons every year, but the actual number of homeless, mentally ill individuals who end up in the D.C. Jail is likely far higher, as are the costs.<sup>46</sup>
- The new applicant families for shelter in 2004 included an estimated 6,993 children.<sup>47</sup>
- There are 1,400 homeless youth in the District of Columbia, but only 38 youth shelter beds and 75 supportive or transitional housing units that allow children.<sup>48</sup>

## IS THERE ENOUGH HOUSING FOR EVERYONE?

- As of November 2006, 54,000 households were on the wait list for government-subsidized housing vouchers in D.C., and more than 30,000 on the wait list for public housing, 16,000 of whom are homeless.<sup>49</sup>
- Washington, DC is the least affordable “state” in the country in terms of housing costs.<sup>50</sup>
- For households that earn under \$10,000, the number of affordable housing units available falls short of the need by 13,800 units.<sup>51</sup> Between 2000 and 2004, the District *lost* 7,500 units of affordable housing.<sup>52</sup>

- The District's home sales market reached new heights in 2005. Sales prices are up by more than 200% and the median sales price is \$415,000—5.8 times the region's median household income.<sup>53</sup> This compares to \$184,000 in 2000 and \$154,000 in 1995,<sup>54</sup> and puts Washington among the top 10 most expensive metropolitan areas in the nation.<sup>55</sup>
- Rental vacancy rates fell from 2.9% in June 2005 to 2.1% in June 2006 – the lowest rate in the nation, compared to a national average of 5.7%. Monthly rent averages jumped more than 7%, from \$1,722 to \$1,894, over the same time period.<sup>56</sup>
- 25% of DC residents spend more than half of their income on housing.<sup>57</sup>
- The total number of occupied public housing units in D.C. declined by 15% between 1998 and 2000<sup>58</sup>, and that decline has continued due to the destruction of public housing units under the federal HOPE VI program.

- <sup>1</sup> The Community Partnership for the Prevention of Homelessness: The Poverty Connection, available at [http://www.community-partnership.org/tcp\\_facts\\_tpc.html](http://www.community-partnership.org/tcp_facts_tpc.html).
- <sup>2</sup> Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments, Homeless Enumeration for the Washington Metropolitan Region 2006 (June 14, 2006).
- <sup>3</sup> Id.
- <sup>4</sup> Id.
- <sup>5</sup> D.C. Department of Human Services, The Winter Plan: Protecting the Lives of Homeless People in the Winter of 2006-2007 at 2 (Aug. 28, 2006).
- <sup>6</sup> The Community Partnership for the Prevention of Homelessness (Elissa Silverman, Families In District Struggling for Shelter, Washington Post, 10/22/06 at B-1).
- <sup>7</sup> MWCOG Homeless Enumeration 2006, supra, n.2.
- <sup>8</sup> The Community Partnership, supra, n.6.
- <sup>9</sup> The Community Partnership for the Prevention of Homelessness: The Poverty Connection, available at [http://www.community-partnership.org/tcp\\_facts\\_tpc.html](http://www.community-partnership.org/tcp_facts_tpc.html).
- <sup>10</sup> The National Coalition for the Homeless. Hate, Violence, and Death on Main Street USA: A Report on Hate Crimes and Violence Against People Experiencing Homelessness 2006, at <http://www.nationalhomeless.org/getinvolved/projects/hatecrimes/index.html>.
- <sup>11</sup> DC Fiscal Policy Institute, Trends in Funding for Human Services in the District of Columbia, April 18, 2005, at <http://www.dcfpi.org/4-18-05bud.htm>.
- <sup>12</sup> National Center for Children in Poverty: *Family Economic Security: State Policy Context* 2006; U.S. Census Bureau: *2004 American Community Survey*, 2005).
- <sup>13</sup> Anne E. Casey Foundation: Kids Count 2006 Data Book, <http://www.aecf.org/upload/PublicationFiles/DA36221056.pdf>.
- <sup>14</sup> SOME: LOW-INCOME AND HOMELESS CHILDREN & FAMILIES, WASHINGTON, DC. January 2007. [http://www.some.org/docs/factsheet\\_families.pdf](http://www.some.org/docs/factsheet_families.pdf).
- <sup>15</sup> Id.
- <sup>16</sup> D.C. Fiscal Policy Institute, Income Inequality in D.C. is Wider than Any Major U.S. City, (7/22/04).
- <sup>17</sup> The Washington Post, Well-Paid Benefit Most As Economy Flourishes, 7/10/06.
- <sup>18</sup> Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond: Labor Market Conditions. [http://www.richmondfed.org/research/regional\\_conditions/5e\\_indicators/pdf/summary\\_data.pdf](http://www.richmondfed.org/research/regional_conditions/5e_indicators/pdf/summary_data.pdf).
- <sup>19</sup> Paul Schwartzman, In D.C. Area Even Subsistence Proves Pricey, Washington Post, (9/14/2005).
- <sup>20</sup> The Access Project. February 22, 2007. <http://www.atdn.org/access/poverty.html>.
- <sup>21</sup> The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation: Coverage and Access of Adults in the District of Columbia: Key Facts, 2004.
- <sup>22</sup> Department of Housing and Urban Development: Fair Market Rents for the Housing Choice Voucher Program and Moderate Rehabilitation Single Room Occupancy Program Fiscal Year 2005. [http://www.huduser.org/datasets/fmr/FMR2005R/map/DC\\_FY2005\\_FMR.pdf](http://www.huduser.org/datasets/fmr/FMR2005R/map/DC_FY2005_FMR.pdf).

- <sup>23</sup> Washington Lawyer: Justice to All. April 2007.
- <sup>24</sup> Otto, Mary. The Washington Post: Tenants Push Against the Tide. April 28, 2007.
- <sup>25</sup> National Low Income Housing Coalition. Out of Reach 2006: District of Columbia.  
<http://www.nlihc.org/oor/oor2006/data.cfm?getstate=on&getmsa=on&msa=541&getcounty=on&county=311&state=DC>.
- <sup>26</sup> Id.
- <sup>27</sup> Kate Jesberg, Interim Director of DC Department of Human Services, Dec. 6, 2006.
- <sup>28</sup> Department of Human Services, Division of Human Capital Development, Food Stamp Program.  
<http://www.dhs.state.il.us/ts/fss/foodStamp.asp>
- <sup>29</sup> The Washington Post, Number of D.C. Affordable Housing Units Plunge, 9/13/2005.
- <sup>30</sup> Susan Levine, Detox Center Inches Toward Better Days, Wash. Post, Sept. 8, 2005, at DC3.
- <sup>31</sup> Budget Advocacy Project: Analysis of the Proposed FY 2008 Budget for the Department of Health.  
<http://www.dckids.org/documents/downloads/BAP-HealthBudgetSummaryFY2008-041107.pdf>.
- <sup>32</sup> Id.; Sewell Chan, DC Study Finds 10% Addicted, Wash. Post, Oct. 2, 2003, at B5.
- <sup>33</sup> Drug Strategies, Facing Facts: Drugs and the Future of Washington, D.C. 1999, at 1. <http://www.drugstrategies.org>.
- <sup>34</sup> Lewin Group, "Costs of Serving Homeless Individuals in Nine Cities: Chart Book," (2004) available at  
[http://documents.csh.org/documents/ke/csh\\_lewin2004.PDF](http://documents.csh.org/documents/ke/csh_lewin2004.PDF).
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<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/crime/jailed/>.
- <sup>37</sup> Carolyn Cosmos, Jail Time Increases Chances of Becoming Homeless, Study Shows, Street Sense, Oct. 2005, at 1.
- <sup>38</sup> Living on an Empty Stomach, *Trend Lines*, Washington Post, March 24<sup>th</sup>, 2006, from AP and Agriculture Department
- <sup>39</sup> MWCOG Homeless Enumeration, supra, n.2.
- <sup>40</sup> Id.
- <sup>41</sup> The Community Partnership for the Prevention of Homelessness, E-Newsletter, Issue III (Nov. 2006).
- <sup>42</sup> The United States Conference of Mayors, A States Report on Hunger and Homelessness in America's Cities 2002, December, 2002, at 97. <http://usmayors.org/uscm/hungersurvey/2002/onlinereport/HungerAndHomelessReport2002.pdf>.
- <sup>43</sup> Institute for Children and Poverty, Inside the Beltway, The State of Homeless Children in Washington, D.C., May 1999, at 1. <http://www.homesforthehomeless.com/pdf%20files/InsidetheBeltway.pdf>.
- <sup>44</sup> The Community Partnership for the Prevention of Homelessness, FY 2002 Continuum of Care Inventory: Public and Private Homeless Services in the District, (April 2002). [http://www.community-partnership.org/documents/Gaps2001\\_Gaps2002\\_2002CoC\\_Inventory.xls](http://www.community-partnership.org/documents/Gaps2001_Gaps2002_2002CoC_Inventory.xls).
- <sup>45</sup> Id.
- <sup>46</sup> Testimony of Phillip Fornaci, Executive Director, D.C. Prisoners' Legal Services Project; District of Columbia Council, Comments on Department of Corrections, Proposed Fiscal Year 2005 Budget, April 12, 2005.

<sup>47</sup> DC Kids Count: Every Kid Counts in the District of Columbia, 12<sup>th</sup> Annual Fact Book 2005.  
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<sup>48</sup> Richard Hooks Wayman, National Alliance to End Homelessness. Homeless Youth in D.C.: Recent Statistics and Findings. <http://www.endhomelessness.org>.

<sup>49</sup> DC Fiscal Policy Institute, Trends in Funding for Affordable Housing in the District of Columbia, March 7, 2005.  
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<sup>50</sup> National Low Income Housing Coalition, Out of Reach 2004: State Ranks Based on Two-Bedroom Housing Wage.  
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<sup>51</sup>  
Fannie Mae Foundation, Housing in the Nation's Capital (2003).

<sup>52</sup> D.C. Fiscal Policy Institute (Elissa Silverman, Families in District Struggling for Shelter, Washington Post, 10/22/06)

<sup>53</sup> Wilmeth, Katie. Affordability Issues Persist Despite Showdown. Washington Post, June 13<sup>th</sup>, 2006

<sup>54</sup> The Washington Post, Boom Is Migrating East of the Anacostia, D13, July 6<sup>th</sup>, 2006

<sup>55</sup> Wilmeth, Katie. Affordability Issues Persist Despite Showdown. Washington Post, June 13<sup>th</sup>, 2006

<sup>56</sup> Downey, Kristin. Rents Rise as Apartment Market Is Squeezed. Washington Post, July 5<sup>th</sup>, 2006

<sup>57</sup> Squires, Gregory, Affordable Housing for the City's Workers. The Washington Post, at B8 (January 25, 2004).

<sup>58</sup> Fannie Mae Foundation, supra, n. 49.