



NEWS The United States Conference of Mayors

1620 Eye Street, N.W. • Washington, D.C. 20006
Phone (202) 293-7330 • Fax (202) 293-2352
E-mail: info@usmayors.org URL: usmayors.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
Wednesday, December 11, 2013

Contact:
Elena Temple- Webb
202-286-1100 (etemple@usmayors.org)
Lina Garcia
202-341-6113 (lgarcia@usmayors.org)
Karen Hinton
703-798-3109 (Karen@hintoncommunications.com)

IN 31ST ANNUAL ASSESSMENT OF HUNGER AND HOMELESSNESS, MAYORS FIND CONTINUED GROWTH IN DEMAND, SHORTFALL IN RESPONSE, PESSIMISTIC OUTLOOK

Cities Fear Their Programs Can't Close Gap Left by Potential SNAP Cuts

The 31st annual assessment of hunger and homelessness conducted by The U.S. Conference of Mayors, released today in Washington, found continuing growth in the demand for emergency food and housing across 25 cities whose mayors are members of the Conference's Task Force on Hunger and Homelessness. Again this year, unemployment led the list of causes of hunger cited by officials in the survey cities, and unemployment also was seen as the chief cause of homelessness among unaccompanied individuals. Among families with children in the survey cities, poverty topped the list of causes of homelessness.

Today's report was released in a telephone press conference by Santa Barbara Mayor Helene Schneider who, with Memphis Mayor A.C. Wharton, co-chairs of the Conference of Mayors Task Force on Hunger and Homelessness. She was joined by the Conference's CEO and Executive Director, Tom Cochran, and by the Deputy Director of the U.S. Interagency Council On Homelessness, Laura Zeilinger.

"We're pleased, of course, that the unemployment rate has continued to drop during 2013," said Cochran, "but there are still too many unemployed workers in our cities, and this continues to add to the stress on emergency assistance programs." He added: "There's no question that the nation's economy is on the mend, but there's also no question that the slow pace of recovery is making it difficult – and, for many, impossible – to respond to the growing needs of the hungry and the homeless."

Findings on Hunger – All but four of the cities in this year's survey reported that requests for emergency food assistance increased over the past year, and three of these four said requests remained at the same level as the previous year. Across the survey cities, emergency requests increased by an average of 7 percent, and officials say that more than one in five of the people needing assistance did not receive it. Among those requesting emergency food this year, 58 percent were persons in families, 43 percent were employed, 21 percent were elderly, and 9 percent were homeless.

In all of the responding survey cities, emergency kitchens and food pantries had to reduce the quantity of food persons could receive at each pantry visit, or the amount of food offered in meals served at kitchens. More than three-fourths of the cities had to reduce the number of times an individual or family could visit a food pantry each month. Two-thirds of the cities' facilities had to turn people away because of lack of resources.

Findings on Homelessness – Over the past year, the number of families experiencing homelessness increased across the survey cities by an average of 4 percent, with 64 percent of the cities reporting an increase and 8 percent reporting no change from the previous year. The number of unaccompanied individuals experiencing homelessness increased across the cities by an average of 4 percent, with 54 percent reporting an increase and 17 percent reporting no change.

An average of 22 percent of homeless persons needing assistance did not receive it during the past year, officials report. Because no beds are available for them, emergency shelters in 71 percent of the survey cities must turn away homeless families with children, and shelters in two-thirds of the cities must turn away unaccompanied individuals.

The mayors' survey increased its focus on homeless veterans this year, and all but two of the survey cities reported success in obtaining federal funds targeted to homeless veterans from the Department of Housing and Urban Development and the Veterans Administration. Officials in nearly four in five of the cities reported success in reducing the number of veterans in the homeless population through use of these funds. The Veterans Administration has set a goal of eliminating veterans' homelessness by the end of 2015, and over half of the survey cities – 56 percent – say their experience suggests that the VA will reach that goal.

Outlook – Beyond many cities' optimism on veterans, however, "Our cities' outlook for the year ahead is decidedly pessimistic," said Santa Barbara's Mayor Schneider. "Of the 22 cities able to project demand for emergency food assistance, all but one expect these requests to increase." The biggest challenge the cities would face in addressing hunger, Schneider said, would be "cuts in SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) benefits being considered by Congress, and the inability of food assistance programs to meet the increased demand that would result."

Officials in half of the survey cities expect the number of homeless families to increase over the next year, and in more than half of the cities – about 55 percent – the number of homeless individuals is expected to increase.

"At a time when our cities are bracing for greater demands on emergency providers, most foresee a cut, not an increase, in the resources at their disposal," said Schneider. "Nearly three-fourths of the cities expect that resources to provide emergency food assistance will decrease over the next year, and more than one-fourth expect that decrease will be substantial. In 62 percent of the cities, resources to provide emergency shelter are expected to decrease over the next year, with 14 percent expecting the decrease to be substantial."

Federal Role – "Dealing with growing needs in the face of dwindling resources is nothing new for mayors," said Mayor Schneider, "but this year we are especially concerned about what could happen to our emergency food and shelter programs next year, and in the years beyond, if the federal budget being debated this week makes it harder, not easier, to meet our responsibilities to all of our people."

"One thing is certain today," said Schneider. "Until our economy improves for all Americans, programs to combat poverty, hunger, and homelessness need to be protected, not sacrificed, by this Congress."

A copy of the survey report, which also contains detailed descriptions of dozens of programs that the survey cities have undertaken to combat hunger and homelessness, can be downloaded from The Conference of Mayor's web site at www.usmayors.org. An audio file of the press conference call will be available on this site following the call.

The 25 participating cities whose mayors are members of The U.S. Conference of Mayors Task Force on Hunger and Homelessness are: Asheville, NC; Boston, MA; Charleston, SC; Charlotte, NC; Chicago, IL; Cleveland, OH; Dallas, TX; Denver, CO; Des Moines, IA; Los Angeles, CA; Louisville, KY; Memphis, TN; Nashville, TN; Norfolk, VA; Philadelphia, PA; Phoenix, AZ; Plano, TX; Providence, RI; Saint Paul, MN; Salt Lake City, UT; San Antonio, TX; San Francisco, CA; Santa Barbara, CA; Trenton, NJ; and Washington, D.C.