



NEWS The United States Conference of Mayors

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MAYORS' HUNGER AND HOMELESSNESS REPORT CITES INCREASED DEMAND IN EMERGENCY SERVICES & SHORTFALL IN RESOURCES

The U.S. Conference of Mayors Release 25-City Survey

Washington, D.C. -- The 32nd annual assessment of hunger and homelessness, conducted by The U.S. Conference of Mayors and released today in Washington, found increased demand this year for emergency food and housing across 25 cities whose mayors are members of the Conference's Task Force on Hunger and Homelessness. Low wages led the list of causes of hunger cited by officials in the cities surveyed, and lack of affordable housing was seen as the chief cause of homelessness for both families with children and unaccompanied individuals.

Today's report was released in a telephone press conference by the co-chair of the Task Force on Hunger and Homelessness, Santa Barbara Mayor Helene Schneider. The Mayor was joined on the call by the Conference's CEO and Executive Director, Tom Cochran, and by the Senior Policy Director of the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness, Richard Cho.

"Again this year, despite the economic progress the nation as a whole is making, we anticipated that problems related to joblessness and other lingering effects of the recession would be reflected in the reports coming in from the survey cities – and they were," said Mayor Schneider. "We have seen some extraordinary efforts by cities, private agencies, foundations, charities, and volunteers to cope with hunger and homelessness. But despite all efforts, the problems remain, as do our concerns about the future."

"It's been more than three decades, and every report on these problems that we have published has reiterated a need for more services and more capacity to help growing numbers of families and individuals in need," said Cochran. "This year is no different," he said. "There's no question that the nation's economy is on the mend. But there's also no question that the slow pace of the recovery in past years has made it difficult – and, for many of our cities, impossible – to respond to the growing needs of hungry and homeless Americans."

Findings on Hunger – Seventy-one percent of the cities in this year's survey reported that requests for emergency food assistance increased over the past year. Across all the survey cities, the requests increased by an average of 7 percent. Of those requesting assistance, 56 percent were persons in families, 38 percent were employed, 20.5 percent were elderly, and 7 percent were homeless. Low wages led the list of causes cited by the survey cities, followed by poverty, unemployment, and high housing costs.

The cities reported a 9 percent average increase in the number of pounds of food distributed this year compared to last, and more money was spent on food this year, with budgets for emergency food purchases increasing by 5 percent. As a group, the survey cities' emergency food budget totaled \$624 million. But the additional food purchased and distributed was not enough: Demand for emergency food assistance went unmet in 27 percent of the survey cities.

In 82 percent of the responding cities, emergency kitchens and food pantries had to reduce the quantity of food persons could receive at each food pantry visit or the amount of food offered per-meal at emergency kitchens. In 77 percent of the cities, they had to reduce the number of times a person or family could visit a food pantry each month. Also, in 77 percent of the cities, facilities had to turn away people because of lack of resources.

Findings on Homelessness – Overall, the total number of homeless persons increased across the survey cities by 1 percent. The number of families experiencing homelessness increased by an average of 3 percent, with 43 percent of the cities reporting an

increase and 22 percent saying the number stayed the same as in the previous year. The number of unaccompanied individuals experiencing homelessness over the past year decreased by an average of just under 1 percent, with 35 percent of the cities reporting an increase, 26 percent saying the number stayed the same, and 39 percent reporting a decrease.

Across the survey cities as a group, 28 percent of homeless adults were severely mentally ill, 22 percent were physically disabled, 15 percent were victims of domestic violence, and 3 percent were HIV Positive. Eighteen percent of homeless adults were employed and 13 percent were veterans.

For families with children, the single leading cause of homelessness cited by city officials was lack of affordable housing, followed by unemployment, poverty, and low-paying jobs. For unaccompanied individuals, lack of affordable housing also topped the list of causes of homelessness, followed by unemployment, poverty, mental illness and lack of needed services, and substance abuse and lack of needed services.

Across the survey cities, an average of 22 percent of the demand for emergency shelter went unmet. Because no beds were available, emergency shelters in 73 percent of the survey cities had to turn away homeless families with children. Shelters in 61 percent of the cities had to turn away unaccompanied individuals.

The Veterans Administration and Department of Housing and Urban Development continued this year to target funds to homeless veterans, and 91 percent of the survey cities reported that their use of these funds has reduced the homeless veterans population. Nearly all of the cities, however, said more affordable housing was required to address veterans' current unmet needs.

Outlook – Most survey cities expect that demand for emergency food will increase in the year ahead. Eighty-four percent of the survey cities expect this, and two of the cities in this group expect the increase will be substantial. No city expects to see a decrease in requests. Making matters worse in 44 percent of the cities is the expectation that there will be even fewer resources to provide emergency food assistance in the year ahead, and two of the cities in this group expect the decrease in resources will be substantial. Four of the cities are more optimistic and expect moderate increases in their emergency food resources.

Officials in 39 percent of the cities expect a moderate increase in the number of homeless families next year; those in 30 percent expect the number to continue at about the same level. In another 30 percent of the cities, a moderate decrease in homeless families is anticipated. The population of homeless unaccompanied individuals is expected to decrease moderately next year in 43 percent of the cities, and a moderate increase is expected in 30 percent of the cities.

In 68 percent of the cities, resources to provide emergency shelter are expected to stay at about the same level as this year, but officials in 27 percent of the cities are expecting a decrease in resources. In two of these cities, this decrease is expected to be substantial.

"It is important to understand that the face of hunger and homelessness has changed as the national economy has contracted. In the City of Santa Barbara, like many other cities large and small around the country, there are many people who were never vulnerable in the past, but who find themselves vulnerable now," Schneider said. "Mayors in cities across the country are doing all they can to provide the resources for those in need, but the number of people looking for food assistance seems to be growing. We are very concerned about what could happen to our emergency food and shelter programs next year, and in the years beyond, if federal budgeting makes it harder, not easier, to meet our responsibilities to all of our people. But until our economy improves for all Americans, programs to combat poverty, hunger, and homelessness need to be protected – not compromised, not sacrificed – by our Congress."

A copy of the survey report, which contains findings, individual city profiles, and detailed descriptions of dozens of programs that the survey cities have undertaken to combat hunger and homelessness, can be downloaded from the Conference of Mayors Web site at www.usmayors.org. An audio file of the press conference call will be available on this site on Friday, December 12.

The 25 survey 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.

The U.S. Conference of Mayors is the official nonpartisan organization of cities with populations of 30,000 or more. There are nearly 1400 such cities in the country today, and each city is represented in the Conference by its chief elected official, the mayor. Like us on Facebook at facebook.com/usmayors, or follow us on Twitter at twitter.com/usmayors.