



NEWS The United States Conference of Mayors

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MAYORS' HUNGER AND HOMELESSNESS REPORT CITES INCREASED DEMAND IN EMERGENCY SERVICES AS ECONOMIC RECOVERY LAGS

The U.S. Conference of Mayors Releases 22-City Survey

Washington, D.C. -- The 33rd annual assessment of hunger and homelessness, conducted by The U.S. Conference of Mayors and released today in Washington, D.C., shows low wages leads the list of causes of hunger cited by officials in the cities surveyed, and lack of affordable housing is 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 (CA) Mayor Helene Schneider. The Mayor was joined on the call by the Conference's CEO and Executive Director, Tom Cochran, U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness Executive Director, Matthew Doherty and Food Research and Action Center (FRAC) Legal Director Ellen Vollinger.

"This report reflects what we already know to be true. Cities and their partnering agencies, along with local charities and volunteers, have worked extraordinarily well together to respond to the needs of those who are hungry and homeless. Yet, despite their efforts, these challenges persist in an economy that, while on the mend, is still lagging," said Mayor Schneider. "We want to underscore that even with exemplary local programs in place to help those in need, the effects of hunger and homelessness are still felt by many families across the nation. Our federal policies must respond to the growing pressure that the national economy has placed on many localities."

"Without question, the nation's economy is in recovery. However, the slow pace of the recovery has put additional stress on cities and made it much more difficult to respond to the growing needs of hungry and homeless Americans," said USCM CEO and Executive Director Cochran. "Every year, we report on these challenges and, every year, we reiterate the need for more services and greater capacity to help growing numbers of families in need. This year is no different."

Findings on Hunger –

Sixty-six percent of the survey cities reported that the number of requests for emergency food assistance increased over the past year. Among people requesting emergency food assistance, 67 percent were persons in families, 42 percent were employed, 23 percent were elderly, and 10 percent were homeless.

Low-wages led the list of causes of hunger cited by the survey cities, followed by poverty, and high housing costs. City officials said that more jobs with higher wages, including a living wage, as well as more affordable housing are actions that should be taken to reduce hunger. Access to preventive health and an increase in SNAP benefits are other important actions to take to reduce hunger.

Across the responding cities, budgets for emergency food assistance increased by 7.2 percent. And across the survey cities, 23 percent of the demand for emergency food assistance is estimated to have been unmet. In 47 percent of the responding cities, the 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 57 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 57 percent of the cities, facilities had to turn away people because of lack of resources.

Findings on Homelessness –

Over the past year, the total number of homeless persons increased across the survey cities by an average of 1.6 percent, with 58 percent of the survey cities reporting an increase, and 42 percent reporting a decrease. The number of families experiencing homelessness decreased across the survey cities by an average of 5.2 percent, with 53 percent of the cities reporting a decrease, 42 percent reporting an increase, and 5 percent said it was the same. The number of unaccompanied individuals experiencing homelessness over the past year increased across the survey cities by an average of 1.7 percent, with 43 percent of the cities reporting a decrease, 43 percent reporting an increase, and 13 percent saying the number stayed the same.

City officials identified lack of affordable housing as the leading cause of homelessness among families with children. This was followed by poverty, unemployment and low-paying jobs. City officials also identified lack of affordable housing as the leading cause of homelessness among unaccompanied individuals. This was followed by poverty, mental health and the lack of needed services, and substance abuse and the lack of needed services.

Across the cities over the past year, an average of 25 percent of the demand for emergency shelter is estimated to have gone unmet. Because no beds were available, emergency shelters in 76 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.

When asked what actions should be taken to reduce homelessness, city officials cited actions such as providing more assisted housing and more permanent supportive housing for people with disabilities.

Outlook –

Sixty-five percent of the survey cities expect requests for emergency food assistance to increase moderately over the next year. The remaining cities expect requests to continue about the same level. None of the cities expect a decrease in requests. Regarding resources to provide emergency food assistance, fifty-nine percent of the cities expect that resources will remain the same over the next year.

Officials in 50 percent of the cities expect the number of homeless families to increase moderately next year, while officials in 38 percent of the cities expect the number of unaccompanied individuals to increase moderately next year. Regarding resources to help the homeless, officials in 60 percent of the cities believe resources will stay at about the same level over the next year.

"As the national economy has changed, the face of hunger and homelessness has changed. Our findings show more and more people with jobs still needing emergency food assistance," Schneider said. "Mayors in cities across the country are doing all they can to provide resources for those in need, but until our economy improves for all Americans, programs to combat poverty, hunger, and homelessness will become critical essentials for more and more people. We clearly need a broader policy response from Congress and our federal elected officials to address these issues."

"USICH is committed to working with communities across the country to understand the meaning and implications they are drawing from different sources of data, including these survey results, said Doherty in wrapping up the call. We're also committed to help mayors and communities develop lasting solutions and strategies, focused on using Housing First practices to link people to permanent housing matched with the right level of services."

"Addressing hunger and homelessness requires a comprehensive approach, which includes improving jobs, wages, income and strengthening programs like SNAP and child nutrition programs, which serve as the first line of defense against hunger," said Vollinger. "There are no excuses for leaving hungry and homeless Americans behind. We commend the US Conference of Mayors for its efforts in calling attention to the reality of hunger and homelessness in America and the solutions that exist to solve it."

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 at www.usmayors.org on Wednesday, December 23rd.

The 22-survey cities, whose mayors are members of The U.S. Conference of Mayors Task Force on Hunger and Homelessness, this year are: Asheville, NC; Charleston, SC; Baltimore, MD; Chicago, IL; Cleveland, OH; Dallas, TX; Des Moines, IA; Los Angeles, CA; Louisville, KY; McKinney, TX; Memphis, TN; Nashville, TN; Norfolk, VA; Philadelphia, PA; Providence, RI; Saint Paul, MN; Salt Lake City, UT; San Antonio, TX; San Francisco, CA; Santa Barbara, CA; Seattle, WA; and Washington, D.C.