

**LEARNING ABOUT HOMELESSNESS AND HEALTH
IN YOUR COMMUNITY:
A DATA RESOURCE GUIDE**

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INTRODUCTION

This resource guide is intended to assist those who work to meet the health care needs of homeless people in their communities. It will be particularly useful to those who are preparing funding applications for the federal Health Care for the Homeless (HCH) or other Consolidated Health Center programs, but it will also be of interest to other advocates, researchers and service providers.

The resources cited in this document are available free-of-charge to the public on the Internet. Readers with limited Internet access may wish to contact the government agency or department directly for print publications.

Information about these two topics – homelessness and health – is plentiful. There is not much information about the intersection of the two, however, particularly at the local level, where services are designed and delivered. At best, this guide will point the reader to resources that may exist. The authors welcome suggestions from readers who wish to suggest improvements to this guide; please contact us at council@nhchc.org. Readers can find the most recent version of this guide at <http://www.nhchc.org/Publications/CA05aDataResourceGuide.pdf>.

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AREA DEMOGRAPHICS/CHARACTERISTICS

STATE AND LOCAL

This section includes sources of data about state and local conditions that may directly affect homelessness in your community, including statistics on poverty, employment patterns, and housing.

General

- State and local census data on economic characteristics (poverty, income, employment, etc.), general population and housing, housing occupancy and tenure, and social characteristics. Also known as the American Factfinder, this user-friendly site can be found at <http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/BasicFactsServlet>
- County and City Data Books are also available from the Census website, including the 2000 version. The data books include data on demographic characteristics, such as income and poverty, and information on crime, housing, health and vital statistics, labor force, environment, and government programs. To download the online version or order the publication, go to <http://www.census.gov/prod/www/ccdb.html>
- The Kaiser Foundation website maintains a searchable database of “*State Health Facts*” including national comparison data at www.statehealthfacts.kff.org. Broad categories of data include Demographics and the Economy; Health Status; Health Coverage and Uninsured; Medicaid and CHIP; Medicare; Health Costs and Budgets; Managed Care and Health Insurance; Providers and Service Use; Women’s Health; Minority Health; and HIV/AIDS.

Housing

- Fair Market Rents for Existing Housing – 2003: Search for Fair Market Rent data in your state or county at <http://www.huduser.org/datasets/fmr.html>.
- Income Limits: View the Section 8 Income Limits set by HUD for 2002 at <http://www.huduser.org/datasets/il/fmr02/index.html>.
- Subsidized Households: This website sketches a picture of nearly five million subsidized households across the United States. It includes, at the state and national level: Totals; Indian Housing; Public Housing; Section 8 Certificates and Vouchers; Section 8 Moderate Rehabilitation; Section 8 New and Substantial Rehabilitation; Section 236; Other HUD subsidies; and Low Income Housing Tax Credits. Go to <http://www.huduser.org/datasets/assthsg/statedata98/>.
- *Out of Reach* is a side-by-side comparison of wages and rents in every county, Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA), combined nonmetropolitan area and state in the United States, available at <http://www.nlihc.org/oor2002/index.htm>. For each jurisdiction, the report calculates the amount of money a household must earn in order to afford a rental unit of a range of sizes (0, 1, 2, 3, and 4 bedrooms) at the area’s Fair Market Rent (FMR), based on the generally accepted affordability standard of paying no more than 30% of income for housing costs. From these calculations, the hourly wage a worker must earn to afford the FMR for a two-bedroom home is derived. This figure is

the Housing Wage. (description verbatim from website)

- Determine your state and/or city's universal living wage at the following website: <http://www.universallivingwage.org/>.

American Indians

- The Indian Health Service contains a variety of information and statistics on American Indian health. See the publications page for a listing of current resources, including statistics on regional differences in Indian Health and a publication tracking "Trends in Indian Health" at <http://www.ihs.gov/PublicInfo/Publications/index.asp>.

HOMELESS

Population Counts

- People move in and out of homelessness constantly, and homeless people often do not wish to be identified as homeless, so good data about homeless people as a group are hard to develop. For a discussion of the complications involved in counting homeless people, see the fact sheet of the National Coalition for the Homeless (NCH) "How Many People Experience Homelessness?" at www.nationalhomeless.org/numbers.html

National

- Results from the Urban Institute's national survey of homeless service providers and homeless persons can be found at <http://aspe.hhs.gov/progsys/homeless/profile.htm>. This survey includes national data on demographic characteristics, health status and behaviors, and service needs of homeless people.
- All Bureau of Primary Health Care-supported health services (including HCH grantees) provide annual data using the Uniform Data System (UDS). State and regional "rollups" of UDS data from 2000 and 2001 can be found at <http://bphc.hrsa.gov/uds/data.htm>. A variety of demographic characteristics, selected diagnoses, staffing, and service utilization variables are collected from each site. Numbers on homeless users can be extracted and their characteristics cited as a national sample on such items as percent uninsured, poverty level, and housing status.
- The Conference of Mayor's status report on homelessness and hunger, including results of their 27 city survey completed in 2001, is located at www.usmayors.org/uscm/hungersurvey/2001/hungersurvey2001.pdf.

State and Local

Many communities have developed estimates of the number of homeless people, and have compiled some information about the characteristics and needs of homeless people. Likely sources of local information include:

- *Local Homeless Coalitions.* A directory of state and local Homeless and Housing Advocacy coalitions is maintained by the National Coalition for the Homeless (NCH) at www.nationalhomeless.org/state/.
- *Local Continua of Care bodies.* Homeless services are frequently funded by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), which requires a community

planning process. (Contact your local HUD office for information: directory of contact information for the location nearest you can be found at www.hud.gov/directory/ascdir3.cfm).

- *Local government bodies.* Mayor's offices, city councils or county commissions, social services authorities or housing bodies have been known to conduct studies of homelessness in their communities.
- *Local universities.* Academics at local universities may have collected local data on relevant topic and/or be aware of other community-level data resources.
- *Newspaper archives.* Newspapers maintain files on important issues, and may provide leads to information about homelessness.
- *Homeless persons.* Services should never be developed in isolation from those who will be served. Key informants can help define what data should be sought, and can help to evaluate the data that are found. (Note: Many communities have homeless-sponsored Street Newspapers, which can provide a sense of issues important to the homeless population in your area. For a current directory of homeless street newspapers see www.nationalhomeless.org/streetnews/directory2002.pdf)
- *Homeless service providers.* (See section on "Resources/Services.")

HEALTH

INDICATORS AND RISK FACTORS

This section includes health status indicators and data on risk factors at the national, state, and local levels. These can be helpful in identifying disparities in health and health services in your community which may have an impact on your homeless population.

General

- The Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) provides reports of a wide variety of health status indicators for every county in the nation. Already-existing data resources are used, primarily from the CDC, NCHS, U.S. Bureau of the Census, EPA, HRSA's Area Resource File, HRSA's Bureau of Primary Health Care, and SAMHSA. Entitled the *Community Health Status Indicators Project*, these data are available at www.communityhealth.hrsa.gov/searchCounty.asp.
- The census *County and City Data Books* mentioned in the previous section also include data on a variety of health indicators and vital statistics. The 2000 version is available at: www.census.gov/statab/www/ccdb.html.
- The Kaiser Foundation website maintains a searchable database of "State Health Facts" which include national comparison data at www.statehealthfacts.kff.org. A wide variety of variables are categorized into the following general areas: Demographics and the Economy, Health Status, Health Coverage and Uninsured, Medicaid and CHIP, Medicare, Health Costs and Budgets, Managed Care and Health Insurance, Providers and Service Use, Women's Health, Minority Health, and HIV/AIDS.
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) conduct an annual survey of behavioral risk factors in the United States. Their searchable database of results from the *Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System* is available at www.cdc.gov/brfss. Data by county on health risk factors such as seatbelt use, use of tobacco and alcohol, hypertension, cholesterol levels, diabetes, physical fitness, (for women) breast exams, mammograms and pap smears, and (for seniors) immunizations for influenza and pneumonia. The System also includes data on health care access and utilization.
- Visit the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) website at <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/> to access data sets and publications from the national surveys they conduct; many of the data are available at state and/or regional levels. The National Health Care Survey includes information from a variety of health care provider surveys about the facilities that supply health care, the services rendered, and characteristics of the patients served. (Components of the National Health Care Survey include the National Ambulatory Medical Care Survey, the National Hospital Ambulatory Medical Care Survey, the National Survey of Ambulatory Surgery, the National Hospital Discharge Survey, the National Nursing Home Survey, the National Home and Hospice Care Survey, the National Employer Health Insurance Survey, and the National Health Provider Inventory.) Other National Surveys conducted through the NCHS include the National Health Interview, the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey, the National Survey of Family Growth, and the National Immunization Survey.

- The National Center for Health Workforce provides the *Area Resource File (ARF)*, available at www.bhpr.hrsa.gov/healthworkforce/data/arf.htm. This is a comprehensive county-specific health resources information system containing information on health facilities, health professions, measures of resource scarcity, health status, economic activity, health training programs, and socioeconomic and environmental characteristics. The basic file contains more than 7,000 variables for each of the nation's counties. All information contained in the file is derived from existing data sources and is designed to be used by those interested in the nation's health care delivery system and in factors that may impact health status and health care in the U.S. (Note: The website includes information about how to access this database, not the database itself.)

Maternal and Child Health and Welfare

- The Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) Department of Maternal and Child Health website (www.mchb.hrsa.gov/data/) includes data and publications on indicators of maternal and child health. For example, *Health USA 2002* includes current and historical data on some of the most pressing health challenges facing women and their families. Data on health and health-related indicators are organized into three categories: population characteristics, health status and health services utilization. In *Child Health USA 2001* one can find population characteristics, health status of infants, children and adolescents, health services utilization, state- and city-level data, and maternal and child health measures and goals.
- The Administration for Children and Families (ACF) website includes statistics, data, research and publications on children and families, including child abuse statistics, adoption statistics, child welfare data, welfare caseload data, and TANF data and reports. Go to www.acf.dhhs.gov/research.html.

Health Professional Shortage Areas (and MUA/MUPs)

- To search databases on Health Professional Shortage Areas at state and county levels, including databases on MUAs (Medically Underserved Areas) and MUP (Medically Underserved Populations), go to www.bhpr.hrsa.gov/shortage/index.htm.

Vital Statistics

- For national and state data on vital statistics, including birth, mortality, fetal deaths, marriages and divorces, visit the National Vital Statistics System website at www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss.htm. You can also learn whom to contact in your state to obtain Vital Records.
- The Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR) contains data on specific diseases as reported by state and territorial health departments and reports on infectious and chronic diseases, environmental hazards, natural or human-generated disasters, occupational diseases and injuries, and intentional and unintentional injuries. Also included are reports on topics of international interest and notices of events of interest to the public health community. These reports are available at www.cdc.gov/mmwr//mmwr_wk.html.

Substance Abuse

- The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) website includes a variety of data sources and publications on alcohol and drug use and

treatment. The results of the 2001 National Household Survey on Drug Abuse is currently available at www.samhsa.gov/oas/topics.htm. Some data are available for specific metropolitan areas as well.

- The Join Together organization has compiled a handbook entitled “How Do We Know We Are Making A Difference? A Community Substance Abuse Indicators Handbook.” They describe the handbook as follows: This handbook was written to assist community coalitions and other groups working to reduce substance abuse. It is presented as a guide to help communities develop indicators, information collected by an organization and other local data, that describe the scope and nature of local substance abuse problems. These indicators can be powerful tools for local community efforts by helping them describe and monitor community change. (Published January 1997) To obtain a copy, e-mail Join Together at publications@jointogether.org.

DISEASES

- *HIV/AIDS Bureau State Profiles* (www.hab.hrsa.gov/HABStateProfiles/habsp.htm) The Ryan White CARE Act provides resources to states, high impact localities, and agencies to improve care for low-income, uninsured, and underinsured individuals and families affected by HIV/AIDS. The Health Resources and Services Administration’s (HRSA) HIV/AIDS Bureau (HAB) has prepared the *State Profiles* in order to describe spending and accomplishments of CARE Act programs and improve coordination among CARE Act programs. State Profiles describe: location of grantee, clients served, grantee accomplishments, and the characteristics of the HIV epidemic in the state (e.g., co-morbidities and other funding sources such as Medicaid, the largest payer of HIV/AIDS services in the nation).
- Tuberculosis -*TB Surveillance* data and statistics are available at the CDC website: www.cdc.gov/nchstp/tb/surv/surv.htm (Note: TB data are available by homeless status.)
- The CDC website also includes data by city and state on trends in STDs, including associated costs and data by race, age, gender. See www.cdc.gov/nchstp/dstd/stats_trends/stats_and_trends.htm. The 2000 *Sexually Transmitted Disease Surveillance* report, which includes national profiles as well as state and area statistics, can be found at www.cdc.gov/std/stats/. Visit the CDC website of data and statistics for a complete listing of available resources and surveillance systems at www.cdc.gov/scientific.htm.

HOMELESS

As mentioned in the introduction, very little health status data are available about homeless populations. *TB Surveillance* (cited in the preceding section) is one of the few sources that provides consistent health data on homeless individuals. The HCH Uniform Data System’s regional and national data provide some general health status indicators specifically for clients served by HCH grantees. The Bureau of Primary Health Care is currently conducting a much more comprehensive “User/Visit Survey” of homeless clients in randomly selected HCH grantees (and subcontractors); these data will provide information on homeless clients’ health status and behavior as well as health service utilization and needs.

Numerous research studies are being conducted in the field of health care and homelessness and can provide useful contextual information. Some sources of published

research on homelessness and health issues include:

- The Policy Research Associates, Inc. website (www.hchirc.bphc.hrsa.gov). provides a searchable database of research on homelessness and health issues.

Recent abstracts from published research on a wide variety of health issues and homeless populations can be found in the HCH Research Updates available on the National Health Care for the Homeless Council's website (www.nhchc.org). (Notify the Council (council@nhchc.org) if interested in subscribing to the free e-mail version of this quarterly newsletter.)

Resources and Services

HEALTH

- The Association of State and Territorial Health Officials website provides links to your state health department and other health-related websites within your state; the site includes statewide strategic plans. Connect to these resources by going to www.astho.org/ and selecting "state links" on the sidebar menu.
- Learn about the Primary Care Service Area (PCSA) Project, a collaborative effort to provide information about primary care resources and populations within small, standardized areas that reflect patients' utilization patterns, at <http://pcsa.hrsa.gov>. The definition of PCSA boundaries and the description of these areas are contained within a database linked to an Internet-based geographic information system (GIS) to allow federal, state, and academic users easy access. (description from website)
- Search for contact information on Medicare and Medicaid services, as well as other health and human services organizations, in your state at <http://www.cms.hhs.gov/contacts>.
- Find contact information for your state's Board of Nursing through the National Council of State Board of Nursing, Inc. website (www.ncsbn.org/public/regulation/boards_of_nursing_board.htm)
- Locate substance abuse treatment facilities by going to www.findtreatment.samhsa.gov/facilitylocator/doc.htm.
- The Indian Health Service website includes a comprehensive Indian Health Service Directory at www.ihs.gov/PublicInfo/Publications/index.asp.
- To locate contact information and descriptions of service delivery sites of the Bureau of Primary Health Care – including HCH clinics, community health centers, migrant health centers, as well as enabling services – in your town go to the following address: www.ask.hrsa.gov/pc.

HOUSING

- Search for section 8 properties by state/city at www.hud.gov/apps/section8/index.cfm
- For local public housing agency contact information, go to www.hud.gov/offices/pih/pha/contacts/index.cfm

HOMELESS

- A variety of information on housing and homelessness services and resources in your state and community can be located via the Housing and Urban Development (HUD) website. Visit www.hud.gov/local/index.cfm , select your state, then select “homeless” on the sidebar menu. Typical information includes contact information for shelters and emergency housing, rental assistance programs, food and clothing resources, health care (e.g. hospitals, affordable health care, detox centers), jobs and training, and legal assistance services.
- Find out how much has been spent in your state or county by emergency food and shelter programs funded through the United Way (www.efsp.unitedway.org/efspnew/Pages/spendingstates.cfm)
- A directory of state and local Homeless and Housing Advocacy coalitions is maintained by NCH at www.nationalhomeless.org/state/

ACRONYMS

AFC	Administration for Children and Families
CDC	Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
HAB	HIV/AIDS Bureau
HCH	Health Care for the Homeless
HRSA	Health Resources and Services Administration
HUD	U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
MCH	Maternal and Child Health
NCH	National Coalition for the Homeless
SAMHSA	Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration