

2007 Annual Report on Homeless Deaths

Summary of available data on homeless deaths in Santa Cruz County
For the period December 21, 2006 – December 20, 2007

Santa Cruz County Homeless Persons' Health Project (HPHP)
A program of the County Health Services Agency Public Health Division

Background:

On December 21, 1999, homeless individuals, community and family members, and homeless service providers held the first memorial service to honor individuals in Santa Cruz County who had died while homeless during the past year. Names of individuals to be memorialized were collected through an informal process and came from several sources, including records of HPHP, other homeless service organizations, and individuals in the community. At that time, no organization maintained a centralized record of homeless deaths.

Data Collection:

In years since, a public health nurse at HPHP has maintained a log of deaths occurring among homeless people throughout the year in Santa Cruz County. The log includes information on confirmed deaths of clients with whom HPHP nurses and social workers have had a direct relationship, as well as confirmed reports of deaths received from other homeless service organizations, medical providers, and homeless individuals. It also includes death certificate data compiled by the County Office of Vital Statistics, and data obtained from the County Public Administrator's office. This year marks the eighth year since the community began holding an annual homeless memorial and since HPHP began collecting data and reporting on homeless deaths.

The data available from this process are most likely an under-representation of the number of homeless deaths in the county. Housing status at the time of death is neither well documented nor always easily determined. People who die from natural causes and chronic illness who are under the care of a health provider in their final days could be missed. Also, information on likely factors leading to death is imprecise, and is often unknown at the time of death. For the sake of summarizing the information, for each death we have assigned a single primary contributing factor, but in many cases, there are multiple significant factors that have contributed to an individual's death.

For this reason the data provided in this summary should not be interpreted as a definitive accounting of deaths among the homeless population in our county. Instead, this reflects our best effort at this time to collect and analyze accurate data on homeless deaths in a way that is meaningful to homeless service providers, to friends and family of those who have died, and to people who are housed and homeless in the community at large.

Discussion:

The total number of deaths reported this year is 36. This compares with the 42 deaths reported in 2006, and the average of 33.5 deaths per year over the preceding six years (2001-2006). The average age of death this year is 48.8 years. This compares to an average age of 48.6 years at death for the previous six-year period (2001-2006). Notably, this year there were five deaths among people age 30 and under, the most in this age range in any single year since 1999.

Combined overdose (including alcohol, street drugs and medications) accounted for 25% of the reported deaths. Traumatic injury accounted for 17% of deaths. This figure included two suicides and one homicide. Cancers (other than liver) also accounted for 17% of deaths. Cardiovascular disease represented 11% of deaths and end stage liver disease, including hepatic cancer, represented 8% of deaths.

About the Memorial:

Our primary purpose with this report at this time of year is to honor and mark the passing of all those who were homeless and have died in our community in the last twelve months. For this reason, our memorial service includes a reading of the names of the thirty-five people reflected in this report, *and also* the names of formerly homeless individuals, now housed, who died during the year. Most of the people who died were personally known to us at HPHP. We are saddened by their deaths and we will miss each one of them. We hope this information will serve to honor their memory, to guide us in our ongoing efforts to improve the health and quality of life for people while they are homeless, and to recommit ourselves as a community to ending homelessness in Santa Cruz County.

**DEATHS AMONG HOMELESS PEOPLE, SANTA CRUZ COUNTY
DECEMBER 21, 2006 – DECEMBER 20, 2007**

1) TOTAL NUMBER OF REPORTED HOMELESS DEATHS: 36

2) GENDER:

Male 27
Female 9

3) AGE:

under 21	0	41-50	9
21-30	5	51-60	11
31-40	5	over 60	6

4) RACE:

White	26
Hispanic	9
Black	1

5) LOCATION AT TIME OF DEATH:

Outside/Vehicle	12
Nursing Facility/Hospice	5
Temporary Residence /Friend's Home	6
Hospital	9
Motel	4

6) LIKELY FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO DEATH:

Alcohol/Drug/Medication Overdose	9
Cancer (other than liver)	6
Chronic Liver Disease	3
GI Bleed (secondary to alcohol)	1
Sepsis/Necrotizing Fasciitis	2
Suicide	2
Homicide	1
Drowning	1
Other Traumatic Injury	2
Heart Disease/MI	3
Stroke (CVA)	1
Pneumonia	2
Unknown/Not Stated	3