



Study counts deaths from homelessness

By Troy Anderson, Staff Writer

Article Launched: 12/20/2007 09:44:36 PM PST

Nearly 3,000 homeless people have died in Los Angeles County since 2000, many alone and forgotten, according to the first study of its kind by the Los Angeles Coalition to End Hunger & Homelessness.

The study - which also lists all of the names of those who have died - was based on coroner's records and is being formally released today, designated as National Homeless Memorial Day.

The report comes as county efforts to institute a wide-ranging and comprehensive homeless shelter program have moved slowly amid funding and other complicating factors.

On average, one homeless person dies every day in the county, according to the report.

While the majority of those who have died have been in central Los Angeles, San Fernando Valley communities had a number of homeless deaths.

No specific numbers were counted for the San Gabriel Valley, but Bob Erlenbusch, executive director of the Los Angeles Coalition to End

Hunger & Homelessness, estimated about 150 homeless deaths.

"It's a hard, hard life out there," said Irene Kubo, executive director of the East San Gabriel Valley Coalition for the Homeless, which runs the area's cold weather shelter.

"They're prone to all the normal things we are, but the problem is they don't get proper care," Kubo said. "You can take the normal run of physical ailments that the general public has and increase it in quantity and degree because of health care. Their lifespans are cut short by 30 or 40 years."

The average age among those found dead was 48, about 36 percent less than the average life span. The cause of nearly half the deaths was cardiovascular disease coupled with substance abuse.

Nearly one in five were killed violently as victims of homicide, suicide or other trauma.

"They're very vulnerable to violence," said Judy Hall, outreach worker for Pomona Homeless Outreach. "Whatever little bit they have gets taken. We've had them come in so afraid they'll be killed."

"The human cost of the tragedy of homelessness in the richest country in the history of the planet is illustrated by these statistics," said Torie Osborn, senior adviser to Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa.

Advertisement

Whittier Daily News (800) 788-1200
WHITTIER, CA

Subscribe today!
www.whittierdailynews.com/subscribe

Print Powered By FormatDynamics™



"And it's heartbreaking. I think it just shows we have a long way to go to step up and take care of our most vulnerable citizens. I mean to die alone and on the streets - what could be a sadder Christmas?"

According to the report, Los Angeles County is the "homeless capital of the nation," with an estimated 73,000 homeless.

Yet only 17 percent of the county's homeless are able to find shelter, the lowest percentage of any major metropolitan area in the nation.

Advocates said a major contributor is lack of accessible services.

"Medical services are a tremendous need in the area of helping homeless," said Terry Hammack, who does outreach for Whittier First Day, a 45-bed shelter and recovery center. "L.A. County provides services, but so many of them are centered in Los Angeles. We just don't get a lot of resources out here and it's a big problem."

Kitty Galt and her partner, Ruben Gallegos, outreach workers for Pacific Clinics in Pasadena, said they stopped counting homeless deaths at 14 over the last 24 months.

Pasadena had a total of 55 deaths since 2000, according to the study.

"When somebody becomes ill or has some kind of crisis, their mental health may make it

impossible for them to reach out," Galt said. "Ordinary health conditions may exacerbate a medical condition, and we may not get there in time."

The report contains seven major recommendations for the city and county to improve services to the homeless, but its major recommendation is to make permanent housing options for the homeless a regional priority.

"A number of these deaths are preventable," said Erlenbusch. "With no resources and forced to live outside, in their cars and in abandoned buildings, it's no wonder that hundreds of homeless people die without dignity in our community every year.

"This is just shameful."

Staff writer Bethania Palma contributed to this report.

troy.anderson@dailynews.com

(213) 974-8985

Advertisement

Whittier Daily News (800) 788-1200
WHITTIER, CA

Subscribe today!
www.whittierdailynews.com/subscribe

Print Powered By FormatDynamics™