



NATIONAL SURVEY  
OF PROGRAMS AND SERVICES  
FOR HOMELESS FAMILIES

SPOTLIGHT ON THE 2009 MAYORS' REPORT  
ON HOMELESSNESS

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a brief from the INSTITUTE FOR CHILDREN AND POVERTY

The U.S. Conference of Mayors' annual *Hunger and Homelessness Survey* documents the magnitude of need among both individuals and families that are facing crisis in cities across America. While the report has consistently provided useful insights on homelessness, year after year *family* homelessness has been overshadowed by an emphasis on individuals. The most recent survey results released in early December, however, offer increased attention to the plight of homeless families, and in particular, shed light on the impact of the recession on American families.

Specifically, the 2009 survey chronicles the change in the homelessness situation in 27 cities across America. Three out of four surveyed municipalities report an increase in family homelessness from 2008 to 2009, with one-quarter recording double-digit increases. Factors such as the lack of affordable housing, poverty, domestic violence, unemployment, and low-paying jobs are cited as leading causes of family homelessness. Several cities also report that record unemployment rates, coupled with extensive home foreclosures, have forced many families to seek assistance.

This year's survey also highlights the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) Homeless Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing Program (HPRP) in its special section on the impact of new or expanded government programs. Interestingly, nearly three-quarters of the cities note that HPRP funding—which provides targeted financial assistance to homeless and at-risk families—will fundamentally change the way they deliver homeless services.

#### A Need for Strategic Planning to Assist Homeless Families

While the U.S. Conference of Mayors' survey is a valuable resource, it is merely a starting point for understanding the struggles faced by homeless families and for developing tailored policy strategies to assist them. The Institute for Children and Poverty (ICP) has developed the *National Survey of Programs and Services for Homeless Families*, an on-line research tool that provides a state-by-state overview of family homelessness and how government and nonprofit agencies organize to address it, including available funding sources. Currently, 46 states and 97 local overviews are available on-line.

ICP's *National Survey* has reviewed and categorized 115 state and local 10-year action plans to end homelessness (see map). More than half of states (27), along with three-quarters (88) of surveyed counties and municipalities have homeless action plans, of which nearly two-thirds (63 percent) address all segments of the homeless population. Many advocates and service providers,

however, are concerned that families are overlooked in the 37 percent of plans that almost exclusively address the needs of—and target resources to—chronically homeless individuals. Perhaps the recent leveling off in the number of homeless individuals, recognized both in HUD's 2008 Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) and the 2009 U.S. Conference of Mayors' survey, is a testament to the effectiveness of this intense planning and resource allocation. Homeless parents and their children merit similar efforts, particularly in light of the recent and unprecedented rise in their numbers. Additionally, HPRP provides a unique opportunity to change the way services are delivered.

#### A View from Service Providers at the Front Lines

Resources such as the *Hunger and Homelessness Survey* are useful for understanding overall levels of demand for services. However, resources that document how direct service providers help families regain stability, rejoin the workforce, and return to permanent housing are scarce. The *National Survey of Programs and Services for Homeless Families* maintains a growing database of information gathered from emergency and transitional shelters that serve homeless families. Presently, the *National Survey* has information on nearly 350 shelters serving families in over 100 localities across the country. These providers are the front line in dealing with the direct and residual causes of family homelessness cited above. In particular, the shelters report providing the following on-site services:

- Case management (90%)
- Employment services (70%)
- Housing search services (68%)
- Education programs (48%)
- Health services (46%)
- Childcare services (25%)

The lessons that these shelters have learned about the needs of homeless parents and their children deserve consideration in any planning efforts during these uncertain economic times.

The *National Survey of Programs and Services for Homeless Families* is an online resource for service providers, advocates, researchers, and public policy makers working in the field of family homelessness. The Web site provides a state-by-state snapshot of the interconnections between governmental and nonprofit work to end family homelessness. For additional information, visit [www.icprwb.org](http://www.icprwb.org)



