

NEWS

From the County of San Bernardino

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July 27, 2011

SAN BERNARDINO COUNTY
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For more information, contact
David Wert, Public Information Officer
County of San Bernardino
(909) 387-5412
dwert@cao.sbcounty.gov

County shares results of homeless survey and report

The San Bernardino County Homeless Partnership has received the 2011 Point-In-Time Homeless Count (PITC) and Survey Report for the County of San Bernardino. This year's count showed a 66% increase from the 2009 count and resulted in a total of 2,876 persons counted compared to 1,736 counted in 2009.

According to the State of Homelessness 2011 Report released earlier this year by the National Alliance to End Homelessness, what we are seeing is a higher prevalence of risk factors associated with homelessness, such as increasing unemployment, decreasing real income for the working poor, and an increase in households with incomes below the federal poverty level. The report also noted that although job growth is rising, the growth has primarily been in low-paying industries, providing little improvement for a family's economic situation.

"The numbers we see are reflective of the continued economic hardships that we have endured in San Bernardino County," said Josie Gonzales, Chair of the County Board of Supervisors and Fifth District Supervisor. "With the long term poor economy and unemployment numbers continuing to rise in our County, more veterans and single fathers with children join the ranks of the homeless. Additionally, families are at higher risk of becoming homeless or remaining homeless for longer periods of time."

On the nights of January 26-27, 2011, under the definition of homelessness set by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development ("persons in shelters for a period of time...and persons unsheltered and sleeping in places not meant for human habitation"), over 300 community volunteers, staff from participating cities, county employees, and homeless volunteers took part in the PITC. Biennial homeless counts are required for communities that receive funding from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

The 2011 effort collected data from 578 homeless individuals identifying areas of need. The 2011 survey results reported that adult males experience the highest degree of homelessness in the county. The survey results also illustrate that the most pressing problems experienced by homeless persons are domestic violence, substance abuse and severe mental illness. Other findings include:

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- The majority of those surveyed indicated being homeless for 12 months or more.
- Of those who reported as serving in the military, the majority served in the Vietnam War.
- Unsheltered homeless individuals are less likely to access public services.

The 2011 San Bernardino County PITC employed the same HUD recommended methodology that was used in 2009. Rather than canvassing every square inch of the County, the methodology uses a sampling strategy, where selected city and county blocks that are representative of the whole population are selected for full canvassing. This produces a conservative count.

“As you know, San Bernardino County is the largest county in terms of size in the contiguous United States,” said Tom Hernandez, Homeless Services Manager for the Office of Homeless Services. “A full count of every block in a county that is over 28,000 square miles in size is not feasible during the timeline provided by HUD.”

The nature of homelessness makes an accurate count nearly impossible. Also, numbers can vary greatly based on definitions established by funding sources and research methods. Homeless persons often shy away from researchers. Many homeless also remain on the move or reside in hidden or remote locations undiscovered by volunteers. Therefore, the count process does not, nor was it intended to, convey the total number of persons experiencing homelessness in San Bernardino County throughout 2011.

For the general homeless population, HUD establishes a definition of homelessness that is utilized for those agencies within the local Continuum of Care. In comparison to other counts, such as the count employed for homeless student populations, the method utilized by school districts is quantified under a separate HUD definition. Differences in definitions and collection methods make for inaccurate comparisons when viewed as counts alone.

More important than the counts produced by various surveys is the identification of trends across all populations. It is the trend identification that sets the stage for agencies to design appropriate and holistic approaches to addressing the underlying causes of homelessness.

The San Bernardino County Homeless Partnership, which is a collaboration of public and private agencies committed to improving homeless services coordination, uses the findings of the report for future homeless resource development and planning.

The findings also help to assess the progress of the San Bernardino County 10-Year Strategy to End Chronic Homelessness and provide important information for updating the strategy.

The Office of Homeless Services, the Continuum of Care lead agency for San Bernardino County can identify homeless assistance resources in your area for community members wishing to become involved in our joint efforts to end homelessness. A directory of current shelters and homeless service providers is available on the OHS website under: <http://www.sbcounty.gov/ohs>.

For more information, contact The Office of Homeless Services, (909) 252-4001. The report can be accessed at <http://www.sbcounty.gov/SBCHP>.

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