



**How Many People
Are Homeless in Chicago?
An FY 2006 Analysis**

Chicago Coalition for the Homeless

In collaboration with the
Survey Research Laboratory at the
University of Illinois at Chicago

December 21, 2006

Executive Summary

Over the past three decades, homelessness has persisted as a serious problem in the city of Chicago. However, throughout that time, there has never been a comprehensive, reliable figure for the number of people who do not have a home. This is a significant gap in not only our public records, but in our public policy. By not adequately accounting for the city's homeless population, we are unable to understand the true scope of the problem and therefore are ill equipped to come up with realistic strategies and adequate resources to address it.

Estimating the number of homeless people is a distinct challenge to do as they are a transient and often invisible population. The city of Chicago conducts a partial census of the city's single-night homeless population. That count includes those who are officially reported as being served in the city's homeless shelters that night and any homeless people that can be counted on the streets or other locations outside of shelters that night. This method has limitations because it is very difficult to locate every homeless person outside, particularly on a cold winter night. Also it does not include people living temporarily with others because they cannot afford housing. This is often referred to as "doubled-up."

Counting those not served in shelters or on the street may be difficult, but it is imperative to do so. To meet this challenge, the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless, in collaboration with the University of Illinois at Chicago Survey Research Laboratory, developed a methodology that is designed to count both those served in shelters and those who never access shelters. The Survey Research Laboratory helped shape the methodology and reviewed the findings of the analysis. Every effort has been made to make this a conservative effort and to avoid duplication.

KEY FINDINGS:

Chicago's Estimated Homeless Population in the Course of a Year

- **73,656 people were homeless in Chicago between 7/1/05 and 6/30/06.**
- **Of those, 26,413 were children, 12,007 were adults in families, 32,105 were single adults, and 7,243 were unaccompanied homeless youth [There is some overlap with between the unaccompanied homeless youth and the other numbers because the definition of homeless youth includes minors (counted under children), youth ages 18-21 (counted single adults) and pregnant and parenting youth (counted as adults in families)]**
- **Of those, 19,477 were served in shelters and 54,179, were living on the streets, doubled-up, in cars, in abandoned buildings, or in some other location that was not a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence.**

- **Of the members of families, 9,048 were served in shelters and 29,372 were living doubled-up.**
- **Of the single adults, 9150 were served in shelters and 22,955 were not served by shelters (Note: It is not known whether those single adults were doubled-up or on the street or in some other situation because a different methodology was used to estimate single adults not served in shelters.)**
- **Of the homeless youth, 1,279 were served in shelters and 5,964 were not served in shelters.**

Chicago's Estimated Homeless Population on an Average Night

- **21,078 people were homeless on a typical night in Chicago**
- **Of those, 4,654 were served in shelters and 16,424 did not access shelters.**
- **Of those, 9,871 were children, 3,824 were adults in families, 6,803 were single adults, and 1,348 were unaccompanied homeless youth. [There is some overlap with the homeless youth and the other numbers as described above]**
- **Of the members of families, 2,595 were served in shelters and 11,100 were doubled up.**
- **Of the single adults, 1,939 were served in shelters and 4,864 were not served in shelters.**
- **Of the homeless youth 464 were receiving services (this includes shelter, but also non-residential services) and 784 were not receiving services.**

DEFINITIONS AND SOURCES:

It is important to be clear about how homelessness is defined in this estimate. Currently, there are two federal definitions of homeless, one used by the Department of Housing and Urban Development and one used by the Department of Education (see definitions below). The primary difference between the two is that the definition used by the Department of Education includes people who are temporarily sharing the housing of others due to economic hardship.

Chicago Coalition for the Homeless and the University of Illinois at Chicago Survey Research Laboratory believe that the definition used by the Department of Education is more accurate in describing all situations in which homeless people find themselves and therefore used that definition for the estimate. In particular, this estimate attempts to

count for the first time those living doubled-up. People who have lost their housing and are living with friends or relatives often change temporary locations on a daily or weekly basis. Shelters may be unavailable, or if available, may not be able to house all members of the family as older boys and fathers are often excluded from family shelters. People in doubled-up situations are dependent on those families or individuals who take them into their homes. They can be forced to leave at any time. They are no more or less in need of permanent affordable housing as those living in shelters. Host families essentially serve as temporary shelters.

Applying the U.S. Department of Education's definition, data was analyzed from four sources:

- 1) FY 2006 Chicago Department of Human Services, Homeless Services and Prevention Programs Annual Report, 7/1/05-6/30/06.
- 2) Chicago Public Schools Homeless Education Program. Data collected on homeless children identified in the Chicago Public Schools during the 05-06 school year, 9/1/05-6/30/06. Because the Chicago Public Schools track homeless children who are living doubled-up as well as those in shelter, this data provides great insight about those who don't access shelter.
- 3) A 2003 statewide telephone survey conducted by the University of Illinois Survey Research Laboratory which asked several questions about prior homeless experiences.
- 4) Unaccompanied Homeless Youth in Illinois: 2005, Timothy P. Johnson and Ingrid Graf, Survey Research Laboratory, University of Illinois at Chicago

Federal Definitions of Homelessness

The definition used by the Department of Housing and Urban Development is as follows:

- (1) an individual who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence; and
- (2) an individual who has a primary nighttime residence that is—
 - (A) a supervised publicly or privately operated shelter designed to provide temporary living accommodations (including welfare hotels, congregate shelters, and transitional housing for the mentally ill);
 - (B) an institution that provides a temporary residence for individuals intended to be institutionalized; or
 - (C) a public or private place not designed for, or ordinarily used as, a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings.

The definition used by the Department of Education to define homeless children and youth is as follow:

(A) means individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence and

(B) includes—

(i) children and youths who are sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason; are living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to the lack of alternative adequate accommodations; are living in emergency or transitional shelters; are abandoned in hospitals; or are awaiting foster care placement;

(ii) children and youths who have a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings (within the meaning of section 103(a)(2)(C));

(iii) children and youths who are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings; and

(iv) migratory children (as such term is defined in section 1309 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965) who qualify as homeless for the purposes of this subtitle because the children are living in circumstances described in clauses (i) through (iii).

METHODOLOGY:

Estimating the Number of Homeless People in Chicago in FY 2006

5,261 = Total number of homeless children served in Overnight (OV), Transitional Housing (TH), Interim Housing (IH), Second Stage (SS), and Emergency Response (ERS) shelters.

Source: FY 2006 Chicago Department of Human Services, Homeless Services and Prevention Programs Annual Report 7/1/05-6/30/06. (CDHS)

The CDHS report only reports data on shelters funded by the city. 40% of the family beds in the system are not city funded and are therefore not reported in the data.

(Source: Inventory of all shelter beds in Chicago, provided by Chicago Department of Housing, 5-19-06 compared to CDHS funded beds as reported in CDHS report cited above.) Therefore, the number was increased to account for those not funded.

Also, the numbers in the CDHS report are duplicative, so the number was reduced to only those who said they had not used other shelters in the past six months.

8,461 = Total number of homeless children identified by the **Chicago Public Schools Homeless Education Program (CPS)** who were living doubled-up (staying with another households temporarily due to economic hardship) in the 05/06 school year, 9/05-6/06.

Note: CPS also identified 2055 children who were served by shelters, but they will not be counted again because it is presumed that they are included in the shelter numbers reported by CDHS.

12,691 = Total number of homeless children who were not identified by CPS and are doubled up. Homeless children living doubled-up would not be identified by CPS if they

were not school-aged, not in school, or if they simply never reported their situation to CPS. This is an estimate based on the number of homeless children in shelters who were not identified by CPS.

Total=**26,413** homeless children in FY 2006

3,787 =Total number of homeless adults in families served in OV, TH, IH, SS and ERS shelters, CDHS

This number was also increased to account for beds not city-funded.

8,220 =Total number of homeless adults in families living doubled-up. These are the parents of children identified by CPS who are living doubled-up.

Total=**12,007** homeless adults in families

Total=38,420 homeless family members in FY 2006

9,150=Total number of homeless single adults served in OV, TH, IH, SS, and ERS shelters in FY 2005, CDHS

Only 50% of single adult shelter beds are funded by the city and therefore included in the CDHS report. This number was increased to account for that.

22,955= Total number of homeless single adults not served in shelters. This is based on a 2003 study by the University of Illinois at Chicago Survey Research Laboratory that found that only 28.5% of persons reporting ever having been homeless in Chicago as an adult had spent time in a shelter.

Grand Total=**32,105** homeless single adults in 2005

3,131=Total number of homeless youth not included in above count

Explanation: A statewide estimate of homeless youth conducted by University of Illinois at Chicago Survey Research Laboratory found there were 7243 unaccompanied homeless youth up to age 21 in Chicago in 2004. Assume this is a typical year. Some of those youth are counted in the above numbers, but it is assumed that they are undercounted because they are less likely to be in shelters in Chicago because there are so few programs specifically for homeless youth and they are less likely to be in school than youth in that age range that are homeless with their parents.

Total homeless people in Chicago in FY 2006 :

73,656

Estimating the number of people homeless on a typical night in Chicago

1,807=Total number of homeless children served in Overnight (OV), Transitional Housing (TH), Interim Housing (IH), Second Stage (SS), and Emergency Response (ERS) shelters on one night. This is based on total beds for children minus 10% as an average vacancy rate.

6,371=Total number of homeless children doubled-up on one night identified by CPS

On January 31, 2006, a day mid-school year, there were 7791 children identified that were homeless, 6371 doubled up and 1420 in shelters. That day is in the middle of the school year. There are more children identified as the year goes on, so a mid-year number is an average.

1,693=Total number of homeless children doubled-up and not identified by CPS.

Same method as above.

9,871=Total number of homeless children on one night

788=Total number of homeless adults in families served in shelters on one night.

Total beds minus 10% vacancy rate.

3,036=Total number of homeless adults in families living doubled-up. Parents of doubled-up children.

3,824=Total number of homeless adults in families on one night

1,939=Total number of single adults served in shelters on one night

Total beds minus 10% vacancy rate

4,864=Total number of homeless adults not served in shelters on one night.

As explained above, only 28.5% served in shelters.

6,803=Total single adults homeless on one night.

580=Total number of homeless youth not accounted for in above.

As explained above.

21,078=Total homeless people on a typical night in Chicago

LIMITATIONS

It was necessary to make some assumptions about portions of the population for which we did not have solid data. It was also necessary to use averages in certain cases when we did not have distinct data for different populations.

A limitation of the data collected by CDHS from shelters was that there was duplication in numbers among the shelters. Because every effort was made to make this a conservative estimate and to avoid any potential duplication, the numbers reported by the shelters were reduced to only include those who said they had used no other shelter in the past six months. Because it was impossible based on how numbers are compiled in the CDHS report to know the extent of the duplication among those who had used multiple shelters, those numbers were not counted. Therefore, the numbers of those served in shelters are likely an undercount.

Another limitation of the data was the fact that Chicago Public Schools only broke out their data into two categories: those who were in shelters and those who were living doubled-up. Any children who were in another living situation, such as in a motel, abandoned building, or a car, were counted under the shelter category. Because it was not known how many of those in the shelter category were in those other living situations, it was not possible to estimate the number of children in those other living situations who were not counted by CPS. Therefore, it is likely that children and families in those living situations are undercounted in this estimate.

There is a more detailed technical explanation of the estimate that can be made available to anyone who requests it.

CONCLUSION

Our hope is that this estimate will spur a more informed dialogue about what it will take to end homelessness in Chicago. Clearly, from the data we can see that many homeless people are not accessing shelters and are therefore potentially not linked to any services to help them escape homelessness. Also, most of those people are not being counted in the city's point in time count and are therefore not taken into account when determining resources needed to address homelessness.

Without solid numbers, we can't know whether we are making progress or not in addressing the problem. An additional benefit of this methodology is that we can update the numbers each year and track the problem over time. It is our hope that over time we will be able to refine and improve this approach to estimating homeless populations in Chicago as we acquire more experience with it, receive feedback, and as the collection of data improves at the Chicago Public Schools and with the new Homeless Management Information System. We hope that with this analysis we can build consensus on the extent of the problem and then move forward with a comprehensive strategy to address it.