

Housing and Homelessness

For years, many have perceived the face of homelessness in Arizona to only be that of a man or woman living on the street and asking for loose change. In actuality homelessness touches thousands of individuals, and the reasons that push them to homelessness are complex and varied. With the change in the economy, the foreclosure crisis and rising unemployment rates, the face of the homeless continues to change. Providers are seeing more families, individuals with an education and those between jobs. Renters whose landlords were foreclosed on and families already living on the edge, now lay their heads on cots in shelters across Arizona.

Estimating the number of homeless individuals is complicated. Homelessness can be a short term occurrence or a long term event, and statistics cannot keep up with the transitory nature of homelessness.

- It is estimated that between 52,000 and 65,000 persons likely experienced homelessness in Arizona in 2008.
- Funding from the Department of Economic Security supported 15,282 homeless persons in shelter and transitional housing.
- The Department of Housing provided assistance to 7,500 households statewide for mortgage and rental assistance and nearly 1,000 households for housing repair.

Impact

The economic, housing and foreclosure crisis is impacting families particularly hard and communities suffer when their neighbors become homeless. It has been estimated that homelessness costs society as much as \$40,000 per individual. The National Alliance to End Homelessness shares some staggering costs of homelessness.

- Hospitalizations are longer, costing \$2,000 more than a hospital visit of a non homeless individual.
- Homeless individuals may serve jail time more often, at a cost of approximately \$20,000 per year, per person.
- School age homeless children miss more school than non homeless children and they move around more, disrupting their educational progress.

A Political Debate

State legislators and Governor Brewer are currently struggling with the state's priorities, budgets and most critical needs. At Valley of the Sun United Way we urge you to join us in advocating for a responsible budget that accounts for the needs of the homeless and other vulnerable populations. Although difficult, a state budget can be created that meets today's vital basic needs as well as strengthening the future for all Arizonans.