

## Hunger & Homelessness in the Cities

**WASHINGTON** - The U.S. Conference of Mayors released its 2009 [Hunger and Homelessness Survey](#) earlier this week, and it confirmed what the Administration has long maintained -- that the economic crisis is putting the squeeze on families.

According to the findings, in the last year, cities have seen the sharpest increase in the demand for food in 18 years, a spike in family homelessness, and a dip or leveling off of individuals who are experiencing homelessness.

The report presents the results of a survey of 27 cities whose mayors are members of the Conference of Mayors' Task Force on Hunger and Homelessness. Respondents were asked to provide information on emergency food assistance and homeless services provided between October 1, 2008 and September 30, 2009.

Surveyed cities reported that, on average, the need for emergency food assistance jumped by 26 percent from last year. The cities also reported an increase in food requests from middle class households that used to donate to food pantries, as well as an increase in the frequency of repeat requests from those needing help. When asked to report on the three main causes of hunger, the refrain was the same: unemployment, housing costs, and low wages.

In the area of homelessness, 19 cities (76 percent), reported an increase in family homelessness, while homelessness among individuals decreased or stayed the same for 16 of the 23 cities (64 percent). Most of the cities that experienced drops in individual homelessness attribute the decline to a policy strategy by federal, state and local governments of instituting 10-year plans to end chronic homelessness among single adults. Not surprisingly, the recession and a lack of affordable housing were cited as the top causes of family homelessness in the surveyed cities.

The Conference of Mayors has been documenting hunger and homelessness issues in the nation's cities, as well as efforts cities are making to address these challenges for the last 23 years.

Results of the survey were discussed at a press conference attended by the Conference of Mayors CEO and Executive Director Tom Cochran, Task Force Co-chairs Mayor Jennifer Stultz, of Gastonia, N.C. and Mayor Kevin Johnson of Sacramento, Calif., HUD Secretary Shaun Donovan, and Janey Thornton, deputy undersecretary of Agriculture for Food, Nutrition and Consumer.

Secretary Donovan, who Chairs the Interagency Council on Homelessness, said that one of the most tragic consequences of our housing and economic

crisis is those who fall into homelessness as a result – whether through foreclosures, evictions, layoffs, or other financial problems.

He noted that with increases in rural and suburban family homelessness, the issue is not an urban problem, but one every community struggles with. He said, “As diverse as our homeless population is, there is one thing that everyone who is homeless shares: a lack of housing they can afford. And as this study finds, high housing costs often lead families to cut back on necessities like food.

“That’s why today I want to reiterate very clearly what I’ve said before – that the Federal government is getting back into the business of affordable rental housing.” He continued, “You only need look at the \$14 billion HUD is investing in our communities through the Recovery Act to see that we are – from our \$2 billion investment in full funding of Project-Based Section 8 to our \$2.25 billion injection of funding to stabilize affordable housing developments financed by the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit.”

In the report, cities reported that the Homeless Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing Program (HPRP), funded through the Recovery Act will ‘fundamentally change the way [their] community provides services to people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.’ Cities are using HPRP funding to develop central intake systems for homeless services, coordinate services more closely with surrounding areas, and offer homeless prevention assistance for the first time.

To combat hunger, many cities have instituted programs to address the challenge over the long term. Examples of successful initiatives include gleaning food that would otherwise go to waste to supply food banks; programs that serve children during the summer and on weekends when they are not receiving subsidized meals at school; food banks offering greater diversity of foods to serve a diverse cultural-client base; and food pantries that help recipients to determine their eligibility for food stamps.