



2007 SAN MATEO COUNTY HOMELESS CENSUS AND SURVEY

FINAL REPORT

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2007 San Mateo County Homeless Census And Survey

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The San Mateo County 2007 Homeless Census and Survey (the “Census and Survey”) provides a wealth of information about homelessness in our community, including data on who is homeless, why they are homeless and what they need to end their homelessness. This study provides crucial data that will enable all those involved in implementing HOPE (Housing Our People Effectively) -- San Mateo County’s 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness (the “HOPE Plan”), to most effectively target their efforts and ensure that the housing and services created will best meet the needs of homeless people in San Mateo County.

The results of the Census and Survey demonstrate that the assumptions contained in the HOPE Plan about the characteristics and needs of homeless people were on target. The Census and Survey found that the majority of homeless people in San Mateo County are single individuals who have one or more disabilities and very limited incomes. Many of them have been homeless for extended periods of time. They are also disproportionately male, disproportionately African-American, and many of them are veterans.

This portrait of homelessness is consistent with the HOPE Plan, which identified single, disabled adults who have been homeless for a long time as the largest group of homeless people in the community. The two key strategies outlined in the HOPE Plan are specifically targeted to meet the needs of this population:

1. increasing housing opportunities by ensuring there is a sufficient supply of safe, secure and accessible housing affordable to people who are homeless, including in particular an adequate supply of supportive housing; and,
2. preventing and ending homelessness by delivering timely, flexible services to support stability and independence, including ensuring that homeless people who are leaving institutional settings (such as jails, hospitals and treatment programs) are able to rapidly secure housing and re-enter the community.

The Census and Survey provides data that confirms that implementing these strategies will be the most effective way to end homelessness in San Mateo County.

Number of Homeless People in San Mateo County

The Census and Survey found that on the night of January 30, 2007 there were **2,064 homeless people in San Mateo County**. Of these:

- 1,094 (53%) were living on the streets, in vehicles or encampments
- 970 (47%) were living in emergency shelters, transitional housing, motel voucher programs, jails, hospitals and residential treatment programs.

The 2,064 homeless people counted comprised **1,755 homeless households**. Of these:

- 1,649 (93%) were single individuals or couples without children
- 126 (7%) were households with dependent children

Using an annualization formula developed by the Corporation for Supportive Housing, there are an estimated **6,646 homeless people in San Mateo County on an annual basis**.

These figures are higher than what was reported in the HOPE Plan, which was based on data from the previous homeless count, conducted in January 2005. The reason for the difference is that the 2007 Census and Survey used a much improved methodology that resulted in less undercounting of homeless people than the previous study. (This suspected undercounting in 2005 was noted in the HOPE Plan). The larger numbers documented in the 2007 are not believed to represent any actual growth in the numbers of homeless people. These methodological differences are explained in Appendix 1.

Who Is Homeless, Why They Are Homeless and What They Need To End Their Homelessness

The Census and Survey included the San Mateo County's first ever county-wide survey of a representative sample of homeless people. Over a period of five weeks, volunteers (including many current and formerly homeless people) interviewed a total of 422 homeless people using a two-page questionnaire. The survey provided data that is essential to understanding why people are homeless in San Mateo County and what is needed to solve the problem of homelessness.

Profile of Homeless People

The results of the survey indicated that the typical homeless person in San Mateo County is a single man with at least one disability. At least 85% of homeless adults surveyed were single individuals or couples who are not living with children, 66% were men, and 72% had at least one disability (mental illness, substance use, chronic health condition, physical or developmental disability). All had extremely limited incomes and the vast majority (80%) were unemployed. More than one-quarter (27%) were veterans of the U.S. Armed Forces.

While homeless people in San Mateo County come from every racial and ethnic background, there is a disproportional representation of African Americans. Among the homeless people surveyed, 31% were African-American, even though African-Americans represent only 2.2% of San Mateo County's overall population. Conversely, there was an under representation of Caucasians and Asian/Pacific Islanders.

The typical homeless person is a long-time resident of San Mateo County. Of those surveyed, 66% reported that they were living in San Mateo County at the time they became homeless, and more than half of them (52%) had been living in San Mateo County for more than 10 years before becoming homeless. Homeless people were living throughout the community -- 66% of those surveyed were living in the more populous cities along the 101 corridor, while 34% were on the Coastside, in unincorporated areas and in smaller cities and towns.

A very high proportion of homeless people in San Mateo County have been homeless repeatedly and/or for long periods of time. Of those surveyed, 39% were considered "chronically" homeless, meaning that they are disabled and have been homeless for longer than 12 months or for 4 times in the past 3 years.

Reasons for Homelessness

The very high rates of disability and unemployment among homeless people are the main reasons for homelessness. Among those surveyed, 25% reported loss of a job or non-payment of rent as the main reason they became homeless, while 37% indicated that their mental illness or substance use was the main cause.

The other major cause of homelessness documented in the survey is the high cost of housing. The reasons respondents most commonly cited for not being able to obtain housing were that they could not afford rent, did not have a job, or did not have money for move-in costs (security deposit, etc.).

Interventions Needed to End Homelessness

The survey presents strong evidence that one of the main things that homeless people need is housing that they can afford. As noted above, low incomes and lack of affordable rental housing were noted as major reasons people became homeless and significant barriers to becoming housed. Notably, only 4% of those surveyed indicated that they did not want housing, contrary to the common misperception that many homeless people prefer living on the street.

In addition to documenting the need for affordable housing, the survey also provided critical data about the services that homeless people need. Given the high rates of disability and unemployment, it was not surprising that the survey found high rates of service use among homeless people. Of those surveyed, 96% indicated that they were currently accessing some form of social services (e.g. health care, mental health and substance use services, job training, transportation assistance, free meals, etc.)

However, although the survey found a high level of service use, it also documented some major gaps in the service system. There was a significant mismatch between the types of services people indicated they needed and the services they received. While 80% of homeless people reported being unemployed, only 12% of those interviewed reported using job training services. Only 54% of those with mental illness were receiving mental health services. And while 27% of those surveyed were veterans, only 10% reported receiving veteran's benefits.

The survey also documented that homeless people tend to be frequent users of emergency services, which are not only very expensive but also are not highly effective in helping them become more stable. Of those surveyed, 43% get their medical care by visiting emergency rooms and 24% indicated they had used the emergency room 3 or more times in past year.

I. PURPOSE

The purpose of the San Mateo County 2007 Homeless Census and Survey (“the Census and Survey”) is to gather and analyze information that is essential to understanding who is homeless in our community, why they are homeless and what interventions they need to end their homelessness. This data forms the basis for effective planning to solve this complex and long-standing problem. The San Mateo County Human Services Agency’s Center on Homelessness was responsible for overseeing this data collection effort, with assistance from a broad group of community partners, including non-profit social service providers, city and town governments, and homeless and formerly homeless individuals.

The Census and Survey was designed to meet two related sets of data needs. The first is the requirement of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) that communities applying for McKinney-Vento Homelessness Assistance funds (also known as Continuum of Care or “CoC” funds) must conduct a point-in-time count of homeless people a minimum of every two years. These counts are required to take place in the last week of January. The Census and Survey was conducted in January 2007 to meet this HUD requirement. The previous HUD-mandated count was conducted in January 2005.

The second set of data needs that the Census and Survey is designed to meet are those outlined in “Housing Our People Effectively (HOPE): Ending Homelessness in San Mateo County” (the “HOPE Plan.”) This Plan is the result of a year-long process that began in 2005 and incorporated the experiences and expertise of over 200 stakeholders, including members of the business, nonprofit and government sectors. The HOPE Plan lays out concrete strategies designed to end homelessness in our community within 10 years.

One of the key recommendations of the HOPE Plan is the need to develop better systems to collect and analyze data on the problem of homelessness. During the HOPE planning process, the stakeholders relied on the results of San Mateo County’s 2005 homeless count as the basis for understanding the numbers and characteristics of homeless people. Although this 2005 count met HUD requirements, it focused almost entirely on counting and provided little information about who was homeless or why they became homeless. As such, it did not provide planners with the kind of data they needed to effectively design solutions to the problem. A key action step identified in the HOPE Plan for the first year of implementation was to make improvements to the HUD-required homeless count in 2007, with the particular goal of gathering data not just on the numbers of homeless people, but to more fully understand who is homeless, why they are homeless, and what they need to end their homelessness.

The data presented in this report not only satisfies HUD’s requirement for a bi-annual census of homeless people, it also responds to the recommendation in the HOPE Plan for improved information about the homeless population in our community. The data from this Census and Survey will be used to guide the implementation of HOPE and help ensure that the interventions undertaken are targeted to achieve the best possible results.

II. METHODOLOGY

The Census and Survey consisted of two components:

1. **The Homeless Census (“the census”)**, a point-in-time **count** of homeless persons living on the streets, in vehicles, homeless shelters, transitional housing and institutional settings on January 30th, 2007 and;
2. **The Homeless Survey (“the survey”)**, consisting of **interviews** with a representative sample of 422 homeless people conducted over a five-week period between February 7 and March 15, 2007. Homeless people who were interviewed were asked to respond to a two-page questionnaire designed to elicit demographic information (e.g. age, gender, disabilities, veteran status), as well as information about why they became homeless and what they need to end their homelessness.

The Census and Survey used the definition of homelessness established in the federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act as the basis for determining who to include and exclude:

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); or
 - b. An institution that provides a temporary residence for individuals intended to be institutionalized; or
 - c. A public or private place not designated for, or ordinarily used as, a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings.

This definition does not include people who are “at-risk” of homelessness (i.e. living in unstable housing situations) or those who are “couch surfing” (i.e. those who “float” from location to location).

Additional details about the methodology used in the Census and Survey may be found in Appendix 1.

III. FINDINGS

A. Homeless Census

1. Number of Homeless People

The census determined that there were **2,064 homeless people in San Mateo County on the night of January 30, 2007**. The table below provides a breakdown according to location and age group (adults versus children). The complete Homeless Census data may be found in Appendix 2.

NUMBER OF HOMELESS PEOPLE (Point-In-Time Count)				
	Adults (18+)	Youth (under 18) Unaccompanied by Adult	Children (under 18) Accompan- ied by Adult	TOTAL
Street Count				
People on Streets	569	19	8	596
People in Cars, Van, Camps	498	0	0	498
Subtotal Street Count	1,067	19	8	1,094
Shelter Count				
People in Emergency Shelters	241	0	55	296
People in Motel Voucher Programs	62	0	45	107
People in Transitional Housing	187	0	119	306
People in Institutions	260	1	0	261
Subtotal Shelter Count	750	1	219	970
TOTAL HOMELESS PEOPLE	1,817	20	227	2,064¹

The data indicates that the majority of homeless people (88%) are adults, with 11% being children under age 18 accompanied by an adult and only 1% youth under age 18 not accompanied by an adult. Of the 1,817 adults counted in the census, 90% did not have children with them, while 10% were accompanied by children.

2. Number of Homeless Households

The census determined that there were **1,775 homeless households in San Mateo County on the night of January 30, 2007**. This table below provides a breakdown according to location and household composition.

NUMBER OF HOMELESS HOUSEHOLDS (Point-In-Time Count)				
	Single Individuals	Couples Without Children	Families With Children	TOTAL
Street Count				
Households on Streets	580	0	4	584
Households in Cars, Vans, Camps	498	0	0	498
Subtotal Street Count	1,078	0	4	1,082
Shelter Count				
Households in Emergency Shelters	192	1	36	229
Households in Motel Voucher Program	19	3	22	44
Households in Transitional Housing	94	1	64	159
Households in Institutions	261	0	0	261
Subtotal Shelter Count	566	5	122	693
TOTAL HOMELESS HOUSEHOLDS	1,644	5	126	1,775

¹ This number differs from what was reported to HUD in San Mateo County's 2007 application for Continuum of Care funding. For the purpose of the Continuum of Care application, HUD does not allow communities to count homeless people living in institutions on the night of the count. The total number of homeless people reported to HUD was 1,798 (2,064 total homeless people minus the 261 in institutions, minus a rounding difference of 5).

Single individuals and couples without children who are homeless represent 93% of all homeless households counted in the census. They outnumber homeless families with children, who are 7% of the total population. Since the HOPE Plan was based on the correct assumption that the majority of unmet need for affordable/supportive housing and services was among this single adult population, the census figures confirm that the focus on strategies to house the single adult homeless population are appropriate.

The Homeless Survey also collected data regarding the household composition of homeless people, with results that differed slightly from the census. Please refer to Section III.B.1, below, for a discussion of the survey results on household composition and the reasons for the differences between the survey and census data on this issue.

3. Geographic Distribution of Homeless People

The following table presents a breakdown of the homeless population based on the city in which individuals were located on the night of the census, as compared to the percentage of the general population that lives in each city. The second column (Homeless Population) includes the sheltered homeless population, who by definition are located where the emergency shelters and transitional housing programs are. The inclusion of the sheltered homeless people skews the data towards those cities that have the most homeless facilities. Therefore, the third column (Unsheltered Homeless Population) is a more accurate reflection of the location of homeless people in San Mateo County.

Cities	General Population	% of General Population	Homeless Population (Sheltered & Unsheltered)	% of Homeless Population	Unsheltered Homeless Population	% of Unsheltered Homeless Population
Daly City	103,300	14.50%	80	3.88%	42	3.84%
East Palo Alto	31,500	4.42%	248	12.02%	222	20.29%
Half Moon Bay	12,250	1.72%	83	4.02%	74	6.76%
Menlo Park	30,400	4.27%	229	11.09%	52	4.75%
Redwood City	75,100	10.54%	487	23.59%	212	19.38%
San Bruno	41,250	5.79%	31	1.50%	31	2.83%
San Mateo	93,100	13.07%	317	15.36%	62	5.67%
South San Francisco	60,400	8.48%	188	9.11%	97	8.87%
Unincorporated	63,500	8.91%	162	7.85%	162	14.81%
Scattered Site Motel Programs	NA	NA	88	4.26%	0	0%
Other Cities ²	201,625	28.30%	151	7.32%	140	12.8%
TOTAL	712,425	100%	2,064	100%	1,094	100%

² See Appendix 2 for a breakdown of the data included in the “Other Cities” category.

This data supports the impressions among planners and service providers that the majority of the County's unsheltered homeless people live in the more urban communities that line the 101 Corridor. Of the 1,094 unsheltered homeless people, 718 (66%) were counted in Daly City, East Palo Alto, Menlo Park, Redwood City, San Bruno, San Mateo or South San Francisco.

The data identified three communities that had a percentage of the unsheltered homeless population higher than their share of the general population: East Palo Alto, Redwood City and Half Moon Bay. Further research is needed to determine the reasons for the disproportional numbers of homeless people in these communities.

Additional information about where homeless people lived prior to becoming homeless may be found below in Section III.B.2.b (Prior Location and Living Situation).

4. Annual Estimate of Homeless People

More people experience homelessness annually than can be counted at any given point in time. In any year, people will cycle in and out of homelessness. For example, someone may be homeless between February and May, and another person may become homeless between October and December. Both of these people would be missed during a January homeless count. Counting people only at a single point in time tends to under-represent the extent of the homelessness problem. For this reason, most communities have developed methodologies for using their point-in-time data to projecting the number of homeless people who experience homelessness on an annual basis.

Using an "annualization" formula developed by the Corporation for Supportive Housing and approved by HUD, there are an estimated **6,646 homeless people in San Mateo County on an annual basis**. An explanation of this methodology may be found in Appendix 1.

This annual estimate of 6,646 homeless people represents just less than 1% (0.09%) of San Mateo County's general population, which is listed as 705,449 by the Census Bureau. This is consistent with both state and national data. The California Research Bureau (CRB) estimates that approximately 361,000 people are homeless in California at any one time, or 1% of the State's population. The number of Californians who experience homelessness over the course of a year is estimated by the CRB to be between one and two million people, or between 3% and 5% of California's general population.³ According to a 2002 study done by the National Coalition for the Homeless, approximately 3.5 million people, or about 1% of the U.S. general population, experience homelessness in a given year.

5. Comparison to 2005 Census

The most recent San Mateo County homeless count prior to 2007 was conducted in January 2005. Data from the 2005 count was used to develop the estimates of numbers of homeless people and numbers of affordable and supportive housing units needed that were published in the HOPE Plan.

³ Foster, Lisa K. and Snowdon, Patricia. *Addressing Long-Term Homelessness: Permanent Supportive Housing*. California Research Bureau. August 2003.

The 2005 homeless count and the HOPE Plan identified 1,385 homeless people on a given night and 4,030 over the course of a year. These figures are significantly lower than the results of the 2007 Homeless Census, which found 49% more homeless people on any given night (2,064) and about 65% more people over the course of a year (6,646). Although the total number of homeless people counted in 2007 was larger than in 2005, the relative percentages of households with children versus those without children was approximately the same in each year.

The main reason for the significant increase in the numbers between 2005 and 2007 is that the 2005 count used a much less sophisticated methodology, which led to a significant undercount of the homeless population. This suspected undercount was noted in the HOPE report. The larger numbers of homeless people identified in 2007 are believed to be almost exclusively the result of improvements in census methodology and do not represent any significant actual increase in the homeless population. For details on the methodological differences between the 2005 and 2007 counts, please see Appendix 1.

B. Homeless Survey

San Mateo County's first ever Homeless Survey provided a wealth of data about who is homeless in this community, the reasons they are homeless, and what they need to end their homelessness. A total of 422 homeless individuals were interviewed for the survey. The sections below present a summary and analysis of the survey data. For complete survey results, please see Appendix 3. A copy of the survey questionnaire is provided in Appendix 4.

1. Demographics

a. Household Composition

The survey found that the vast majority of homeless people either lived alone or with other adults and no children:

- 47% lived alone
- 17% lived with other adults (spouse, partner, friend, other adult family member) and no children
- 15% lived with a child/children or with another adult and a child/children
- 20% indicated that they lived with "others" (not specified)⁴

This data is consistent with the data from the census presented in Section III.A.1 (Number of Homeless Adults), which found that the 90% of the adults counted did not have children living with them, while only 10% had children living with them. The survey found a slightly larger number of adults living with children (15%). The reason for this difference most likely due to the locations where the survey interviews were conducted. As explained in more detail in Appendix 1, the survey sample somewhat over-represented homeless people staying in shelters and transitional housing versus those who were living in the streets. Since about 60% of the shelter and transitional housing beds in San Mateo County are reserved for families with

⁴ Since respondents were not asked to specify what "other" meant, it is not known exactly whom these other household members were. It is likely that many of the respondents who selected the "other" category were living with un-related adults that they did not label either as a "partner" or a "friend" (e.g. a person living in the same encampment).

children, the over-representation of sheltered homeless people probably led to an over-representation of adults with children in the survey sample.⁵

However, even given the differences between the data in the census and survey, both sources support the analysis presented in the HOPE Plan that the vast majority of homeless people in San Mateo County are single people or couples without children. The strategies developed in the HOPE Plan correctly prioritized developing housing and services to meet the needs of single homeless adults.

In addition to asking who homeless people were living with, the survey also asked if respondents had any children, whether living with them or living elsewhere:

- 15% had children under age 18 living with them
- 6% had children in foster care
- 14% had children who did not live with them but were not in foster care (including adult children who did not live with them)
- 5% had adult children living with them
- 60% had no children.

This data provides some interesting depth to the profile of the typical homeless person. While the survey indicated that 85% of homeless people did not have any children under age 18 living with them, it also showed that many of these people actually did have children – either children under 18 who did not live with them (whether in foster care or with another parent or guardian) or adult children who either lived with them or lived elsewhere. Although the typical homeless person is a single individual who is not living with children, these are not necessarily all people who have no children. When factoring in those homeless people who had adult children or children under 18 not living with them, only 60% of the homeless people surveyed actually had no children at all.

The survey also revealed some significant differences between the 15% of homeless adults who were living with children under 18 compared to the 85% who were not living with minor children. Those who reported that they had minor children living with them were predominantly women (72%). The adults with children also had a higher representation of racial and ethnic minority groups: 71% were either African American, Latino, Asian, Pacific Islander, American Indian or multi-racial, compared to only 57% of adults without children who were members of these groups. Adults with children were much more likely to be employed, with 41% reporting having either part or full time work, compared to only 16% of adults without children. Both adults with and without children reported similar levels of mental illness, depression and chronic health problems. However, the adults without children were much more likely to report having alcohol abuse, drug abuse or post-traumatic stress disorder. Adults without children also were three times more likely to report that alcohol or drug use was the main event leading to their homelessness.

⁵ Please note that the census data presented in Section III.A.2 (Number of Homeless Households), which indicates that only 7% of homeless households were families with children cannot be meaningfully compared to the data in the survey due to methodological differences between the census and survey. Please see Appendix 1 for more information.

b. Age

The survey demonstrated that the majority of the homeless population are adults between the ages of 21 and 60. The age breakdown of the survey respondents was:

- 3% between 18 – 21 years old
- 92% between 21 – 60 years old
- 5% more than 60 years old

The survey did not gather data on the number of homeless people who are “transition age youth” (TAY), which is generally defined as those between 18 and 25 years of age. Many studies have demonstrated that there is a great need for supportive and affordable housing for this population and there are several specialized funding sources to create supportive housing for TAY. In order to understand the need for housing among this population in San Mateo County, this data element will be added to the next survey.

However, the survey did show that 13% of those surveyed reported having been in foster care, which is consistent with national findings that a significant number of emancipated foster youth become homeless.

c. Race

The race and ethnicity of those responding to the survey was:

- 41% are Caucasian
- 31% are African American
- 17% are Hispanic/Latino
- 3% are Asian
- 2% are Pacific Islander
- 1% are American Indian/Alaskan Native
- 4% are Multi-Ethnic/Other

This data demonstrates that African Americans are disproportionately overrepresented and Caucasians and Asian-Americans are disproportionately underrepresented among the homeless population in San Mateo County:

- 2.2% of the county’s population is African American (according to the 2001 California Health Interview Survey), whereas African Americans comprise 31% of the homeless population.
- 54% of the county’s population is Caucasian, while Caucasians comprise only 41% of the homeless population.
- 20% of the county’s population is Asian or Pacific Islander, whereas only 5% of the homeless population is Asian or Pacific Islander.

The over-representation of African Americans is consistent with national data. Nationally, 45% of sheltered homeless adults are African-American, but this group represents only 12.3% of the U.S. general population.⁶

⁶U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), *The Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress*, February 2007, page 31.

d. Gender

The survey found that 66% of homeless adults in San Mateo County are male while 34% are female. This is consistent with national data, which shows that 65% of sheltered homeless adults are male and 35% are female.⁷

e. Veteran Status

Twenty-seven percent of the survey respondents reported having served in the US Armed Forces. This is fairly consistent with national data. Estimate of the number of homeless people who are veterans range from 19% up to 40%.⁸

2. Characteristics of Homelessness

a. Length of Homelessness

The survey demonstrated that there are significant numbers of people in San Mateo County who have been homeless for a long period of time:

- 19% had been homeless for more than 3 years
- 17% for 1 to 3 years
- 17% for 7 to 12 months
- 47% for less than 12 months

There were also large numbers of people who had experienced multiple episodes of homelessness in the past three years:

- 20% had been homeless 6 or more times in the past three years
- 10% had been homeless 4 or 5 times
- 27% had been homeless 2 or 3 times
- 43% had been homeless only 1 time

HUD defines a chronically homeless person as a single individual (without dependent children) with a disability who has been homeless for more than 12 months or more than 4 times in three years. The survey found that:

- 146 people or 35% of respondents met HUD's definition of chronic homelessness
- 18 people or 4% of respondents were adults with children who had a disability and had been homeless for more than 12 months or more than 4 times in three years. Although these 18 people do not meet HUD's definition of chronic homelessness (because HUD only considers single individuals without children to be chronically homeless), they do meet the definition of chronic homelessness established in the HOPE Plan.
- Altogether, 164 people or 39% of respondents were chronically homeless by HOPE standards.

b. Prior Location and Living Situation

The survey showed that the majority of homeless people in San Mateo County have been in the community for a long time:

- 66% reported living in San Mateo County at the time they became homeless

⁷ Ibid.

⁸U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), *The Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress*, February 2007, page 31, indicates that 19% of sheltered homeless people are veterans. The National Alliance to End Homelessness (www.naeh.org) indicates that estimates range from 25% to 40%.

- Of these, 73% had lived in San Mateo County for 3 years or more before becoming homeless, with 52% reporting having lived in San Mateo County for more than 10 years before becoming homeless.

Immediately before becoming homeless:

- 35% were renting a home or apartment
- 28% were living with relatives or friends
- 16% were in publicly funded institutions, i.e., jail or prison, hospital, treatment programs
- 10% were living in a home owned by themselves or their partner

c. Reasons for Homelessness

The survey results demonstrated that the reasons for homelessness and the barriers to becoming housed are both financial and behavioral:

The primary events or conditions for becoming homeless were:

- 31% reported alcohol or drug use;
- 18% reported loss of a job;
- 7% reported being evicted due to non-payment of rent;
- 6% reported incarceration
- 6% reported mental health issues
- 32% reported other reasons

The primary reasons identified for not being able to get permanent housing were:

- 54% can't afford rent
- 53% don't have jobs
- 32% have bad credit
- 31% don't have move-in monies
- 18% don't have transportation
- 14% have a criminal record
- 4% don't want permanent housing

(This question allowed for multiple responses so the percentages do not add up to 100)

Notably, a very small percentage of homeless people (4%) reported that they did not want to have permanent housing, a finding that helps to dispel the myth that many homeless people prefer to live outside and do not want housing.

3. Disability

The survey data demonstrated that a large majority of homeless people in San Mateo County are disabled. Of those surveyed, 72% reported that they had at least one disability, while only 28% said they did not have any disabilities.

Not only are many homeless people disabled, but also many have multiple disabilities:

- 28% of those interviewed reported having no disabilities
- 26% had one disability
- 20% had two disabilities
- 26% had three or more disabilities

(These categories were mutually exclusive, so the total adds up to 100%.)

The types of disabilities reported included mental illness, substance abuse, chronic health conditions, physical and developmental disabilities:

- 57% reported having depression
- 35% reported having a mental illness
- 35% reported having a physical disability
- 33% reported drug abuse
- 31% reported alcohol abuse
- 39% reported either drug abuse or alcohol abuse or both
- 28% reported chronic health problems
- 26% reported post traumatic stress disorder
- 12% reported developmental disability
- 2% reported HIV/AIDS

(Respondents were asked to report all applicable disabilities, so the totals do not add up to 100%.)

National data suggests that those homeless people who have co-occurring mental health and/or substance abuse and/or chronic health conditions typically face the most challenges in securing and maintaining housing, tend to be frequent users of costly emergency services and are very likely to have improved outcomes when they are able to secure a supportive housing unit. The survey found that:

- 13% of those surveyed had co-occurring mental illness and substance abuse
- 7% had co-occurring mental illness, substance abuse and chronic health conditions

4. Income, Employment and Education

The survey confirmed that the majority of homeless people have very little and in many cases no income from employment:

- 80% reported being unemployed
- 10% reported being employed full-time
- 10% were employed part-time

The main reasons homeless people were not able to get employment were:

- 36% reported alcohol/drug use
- 23% didn't have transportation
- 23% didn't have a permanent address
- 21% reported health problems
- 20% reported being disabled
- 18% had a criminal record
- 3% reported not wanting to work

(This question allowed for multiple responses so the percentages do not add up to 100)

It is notable that only 3% of homeless people reported that they did not want to work. This provides evidence to dispute the common misperception that homeless people do not want employment.

In spite of the large numbers of homeless people with disabilities and without employment, a significant percentage reported having no support from government benefit programs (e.g. food stamps, SSI, etc.):

- 36% receive no government benefits
- 30% receive food stamps
- 20% receive General Assistance
- 20% receive Medi-Cal/Medi-Care
- 13% receive SSI (Supplemental Security Income) or SSDI
- 10% receive veterans benefits
- 7% receive CalWORKS

(This question allowed for multiple responses so the percentages do not add up to 100)

Some homeless people surveyed supplement their benefits and/or employment with other sources of income:

- 41% receive income from family and friends
- 21% receive income from panhandling
- 18% receive income from recycling

The homeless people surveyed were rather well-educated, with 89% attaining at least a high school diploma and 76% reporting some education beyond high school. By comparison, the US Census indicates that 85% of adults in San Mateo County have a high school diploma.

The highest level of education completed by homeless people surveyed were:

- 39% had some college, no degree
- 25% had an AA degree and
- 6% had a BA degree
- 6% had a technical certificate
- 19% had a high school diploma/GED
- 5% had less than a high school diploma

5. Service Need and Usage

The Survey data documented that use of available social services among homeless people was relatively high, with only 4% reporting that they were using no services at all. However, the data suggests that there were significant gaps in the service system – many homeless people are not receiving the types of services they need:

- While 80% of homeless people surveyed were unemployed, only 12% of those interviewed reported using job training services.
- Of those who reported having a mental illness, only 54% reported that they were receiving mental health services.
- Of those who reported have a substance abuse problem, only 64% indicated that they were receiving substance abuse counseling.
- About 27% of those surveyed were veterans, however only 10% reported receiving veteran's benefits. This is consistent with national data that indicates that while anywhere from 20% to 40% of homeless people are veterans, many of them do not receive any veteran's benefits.

The Survey data also confirmed the findings from numerous studies nation-wide that many homeless people are frequent users of emergency services:

- 43% get their medical care from the San Mateo Medical Center, Stanford Hospital, or SF General Hospital emergency rooms (ER)
- 24% have used the ER 3 or more times in past year
- 38% reported having spent at least one night in jail in the last 12 months

Only 7% of respondents reported experiencing domestic/partner violence or abuse, which appears somewhat low compared to national averages, which have found that anywhere from 27% to 63% of homeless women have experienced domestic violence.⁹ Further research is needed to understand this result and determine whether it represents an undercount of homeless people in San Mateo County needing domestic violence services.

⁹ National Coalition for the Homeless, *Domestic Violence and Homelessness Fact Sheet*, August 2007.