



NEW HAVEN/STATE



Homelessness on the rise across state

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The 2011 "Point-in-Time" homeless count — a statewide snapshot taken in one night in January — shows an increase in the number of people experiencing homelessness across the board.

Chronic homelessness among adults without children rose 26 percent since 2009. Unsheltered homeless persons and families are counted during odd years only, in accordance with a schedule set by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Among homeless adults sleeping on the streets, in woods, in

abandoned buildings and other places not intended for human habitation, there has been a 37 percent increase in long-term homelessness in Connecticut, according to Point-in-Time results released Wednesday by the Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness.

In New Haven, chronic homelessness jumped by 12 percent, compared to 20 percent in Bridgeport, 17 percent in Hartford and 26 percent for the state. "The indication that people are homeless for very long periods of time is difficult. It means people can't get out of homelessness," said CCEH Executive Director Carol Walter.

Priscilla Lewis, a mother of two residing in a New Haven Home Recovery shelter, knows

the difficulties of climbing out of homelessness. She called New Haven Home Recovery for two months before securing beds for her and the children in May.

"I was calling every day, sometimes twice a day," Lewis said. She had been living with a sister who died suddenly following a stroke.

Carmen Muniz, assistant shelter coordinator, said 325 people had to be turned away in June, then 336 in July because all facilities were at full capacity.

Carmen Brown, shelter coordinator, said the number of people turned away daily is always 10 or more, despite slight seasonal summer decreases.

"On Monday, we turned away 23 people in that one day," said Kristen McKay, executive

assistant for New Haven Home Recovery. "People aren't homeless because they aren't trying. There's a lack of affordable housing in the community."

McKay said the public may call the nonprofit agency at 203-492-4866 to volunteer, make contributions or donate items to its food bank or furniture coop.

The CCEH report also revealed an 8 percent growth in total homelessness across the state between 2009 and 2011, with counts reaching 4,154 and 4,465, respectively. That 696 people were unsheltered the night of the count in January was a "sobering finding," Walter said.

"The outdoor count startled me because of the weather that night," Walter said. "It had

snowed about a foot the night before and there were 4-foot snow drifts all over the place."

The count did uncover a positive trend: the number of veterans found sleeping outdoors across the state dropped by 15 percent.

Walter said the current state budget does not cut funding for homeless services. "The important thing to understand is: there's no more room in our shelter system," she said. "We must get vouchers to people who need them."

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