MENTAL ILLNESS AND HOMELESSNESS

FACT SHEET

FLORIDA COUNCIL FOR COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH

November 2010

- There are 671,859 people experiencing homelessness on any given night in the United States - roughly 22 of every 10,000 people are homeless. National Alliance to End Homelessness, accessed 2010

- Of that number, 37 percent are people in families and 63 percent are individuals; 18 percent of the homeless population is considered “chronic,” and 20 percent of the homeless population is made up of veterans. (National Alliance to End Homelessness, accessed 2010)

- According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 20 to 25% of the homeless population in the United States suffers from some form of severe mental illness. (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2009)

- In a 2008 survey performed by the U.S. Conference of Mayors, 25 cities were asked for the three largest causes of homelessness in their communities. Mental illness was the third largest cause of homelessness for single adults (mentioned by 48% of cities). For homeless families, mental illness was mentioned by 12% of cities as one of the top 3 causes of homelessness. (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2009)

- In addition, half of the mentally ill homeless population in the United States also suffers from substance abuse and dependence (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration). (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2009)

- Although obtaining an accurate, recent count is difficult, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (2003) estimates, 38% of homeless people were dependent on alcohol and 26% abused other drugs. Alcohol abuse is more common in older generations, while drug abuse is more common in homeless youth and young adults (Didenko and Pankratz, 2007).

- A 2008 survey by the United States Conference of Mayors asked 25 cities for their top three causes of homelessness. Substance abuse was the single largest cause of homelessness for single adults (reported by 68% of cities). Substance abuse was also mentioned by 12% of cities as one of the top three causes of homelessness for families. (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2009)

- According to a report in the New England Journal of Medicine, homeless people spent an average of four days longer per hospital visit than comparable non-homeless people. This extra cost, approximately $2,414 per hospitalization, is attributable to homelessness. (National Alliance to End Homelessness, accessed 2010)

- People who are homeless spend more time in jail or prison, which is tremendously costly to the state and locality. Often, time served is a result of laws specifically targeting the homeless population, including regulations against loitering, sleeping in cars, and begging. (National Alliance to End Homelessness, accessed 2010)

- According to a University of Texas two-year survey of homeless individuals, each person cost the taxpayers $14,480 per year, primarily for overnight jail. A typical cost of a prison bed in a state or federal prison is $20,000 per year. (National Alliance to End Homelessness, accessed 2010)

- In Florida, homeless people (when given a list of options) have identified the following reasons for their homelessness: employment/financial reasons (50%); medical/disability problems (16%); housing issues (12%); family problems (12%); forced to relocate from home (7%); other reasons (1%); and natural/other disasters (1%). (Florida Coalition for the Homeless, 2010)

- On any given night there are 57,687 homeless in Florida, based on federal definitions that probably lead to undercounts. (Florida Coalition for the Homeless, 2010).

- The majority of homeless people in Florida (68%) have lived in the county they reside for more than a year. (Florida Coalition for the Homeless, 2010)

- 39% of Florida’s homeless have been homeless for one year or more. (Florida Coalition for the Homeless, 2010).

- Florida has the 3rd largest homeless population in the nation. (Florida Coalition for the Homeless, 2010).

- 50% of Florida’s homeless have been homeless 2 or more times; 22% have been homeless 4 or more times. (Florida Coalition for the Homeless, 2010).

- Preventing homelessness is the most effective and cost efficient way to stop homelessness in Florida. It costs nearly 90 percent less to prevent an episode of homelessness for a family of 4 than to help the family out of homelessness. (Florida Coalition for the Homeless, 2010)

- 44% of Florida’s homeless have a disabling condition, including mental illness or an addictive disorder. (Florida Coalition for the Homeless, 2010)

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• The majority (85%) of the homeless population is single adults. (DCF, 2010)
• In 2009, of the homeless subpopulations living in emergency shelters, 14.4% were long-term, chronic illness; 19.6% were severely mentally ill; 25.9% were individuals with substance use disorders; 12.1% are veterans; and 10.4% are victims of domestic violence. (DCF, 2010)
• Florida’s homeless population increased by more than 10% from 2007 to 2009. (DCF, 2010)
• In 2009 in Florida, the unmet demand for beds to serve the homeless in our communities was 37,146 beds: 10,471 emergency shelter beds; 10,399 transitional housing beds; and 16,006 permanent housing bids. (DCF, 2010)
• In a survey by the United States Conference of Mayors (2008), 20% of cities listed better coordination with mental health service providers as one of the top three items needed to combat homelessness. (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2009)
• Even if homeless individuals with mental illnesses are provided with housing, they are unlikely to achieve residential stability and remain off the streets unless they have access to continued treatment and services. Research has shown that supported housing is effective for people with mental illnesses (National Mental Health Association, 2006).
• Homeless people with mental illnesses are more likely to recover and achieve residential stability if they have access to supported housing programs. (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2009)
• Many mentally ill homeless people are unable to obtain access to supportive housing and/or other treatment services. The mental health support services most needed include case management, housing, and treatment. (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2009)
• The recession will force 1.5 million more people into homelessness over the next two years, according to estimates by The National Alliance to End Homelessness. In a 2008 report, the U.S. Conference of Mayors cited a major increase in the number of homeless in 19 out of the 25 cities surveyed. On average, cities reported a 12 percent increase of homelessness since 2007. (National Alliance to End Homelessness, accessed 2010)
• A study of hospital admissions of homeless people in Hawaii revealed that 1,751 adults were responsible for 564 hospitalizations and $4 million in admission costs. Their rate of psychiatric hospitalization was over 100 times higher than their non-homeless cohort. The researchers conducting the study estimate that the excess cost for treating these homeless individuals was $3.5 million or about $2,000 per person. (National Alliance to End Homelessness, accessed 2010)