



## Homelessness, Mental Health and Substance Use Disorders Fact Sheet

### The Facts:

#### **The Impact of Mental Health and Substance Use Disorders on Homelessness:**

Nationally, it is estimated that 20 to 25% of the homeless population in the United States suffers from some form of severe Mental Illness. In comparison, only 6% of Americans are severely Mentally Ill. 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<sup>1</sup>.

Substance use problems are both a consequence of and a leading factor in the continuance of homelessness among individuals. It is estimated that nearly half of all individuals experiencing homelessness, and 70 percent of Veterans experiencing homelessness, suffer from substance use disorders. A majority of those with Substance Use Disorders also suffer from moderate to severe Mental Illness. Substance use is also a prevalent characteristic among unaccompanied youth<sup>2</sup>. Data from research conducted in the past five years indicates that:

- About 30% of people who are chronically homeless have mental health conditions.
- About 50% have co-occurring substance use problems<sup>3</sup>.

Many individuals with substance abuse problems face multiple barriers to accessing housing while suffering from addiction, as many shelters require sobriety to access their services and they are “screened out” of public housing. Chronic homelessness is associated with alcohol and illicit substance problems. Being without a stable place during substance abuse recovery only increases the likelihood that these treatments will fail.

**Homelessness in Kitsap County:** On any given day there are estimated to be more than 500 people living on the streets, in vehicles, and in the woods of Kitsap County, in shelters, in transitional housing, or with friends and family in temporary situations<sup>4</sup>. Homelessness costs our community. Each year, Kitsap County residents’ tax dollars are spent caring for homeless people through our emergency services – 911, emergency rooms and clinics, law enforcement, fire and rescue units, jails, detoxification programs, the judiciary system and more<sup>5</sup>.

The Point In Time Count is an annual count (a single 24 hour period, not reflective of total number homeless over the year) of sheltered and unsheltered homeless persons in Washington. Of the 523 individuals counted in 2012, participants gave many and varied reasons for becoming homeless.

Combining overarching themes, the following emerge as reasons contributing to homelessness:

- Economic factors and job loss top the list - 279 or 53%
- Family break-up, domestic violence - 196 or 37%
- Re-entering the community from jail, prison, or mental institution - 154 or 30%
- Eviction or the ending of a temporary living situation – 142 or 27%
- Medical or mental health issues – 95 or 18%
- Alcohol or drug use – 95 or 18%

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<sup>1</sup> Mental Illness and Homelessness, National Coalition for the Homeless (2009)

<sup>2</sup> United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (2013)

<sup>3</sup> Current Statistics on the Prevalence and Characteristics of People Experiencing Homeless in the United States, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (2011)

<sup>4</sup> Heading Home: Kitsap Homeless Housing Plan 2012, Kitsap Regional Coordinating Council (2012)

<sup>5</sup> Heading Home: Kitsap Homeless Housing Plan 2012, Kitsap Regional Coordinating Council (2012)

**Prevalence of Housing for Individuals** discharged from behavioral health treatment facilities in the 12 months following a client's last discharge month in State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2010:

- Nearly half of the 9,909 clients discharged from residential chemical dependency (CD) treatment facilities had an indication of housing need, yet only 18 percent of those in need received housing assistance.
- Approximately 30 percent of the 1,792 clients discharged from state mental health hospitals had an indication of housing need, yet only 17 percent of those in need received housing assistance.
- Housing need was identified through multiple service systems. Of particular note, 32 percent of residential CD treatment facility leavers and 39 percent of state mental hospital leavers had housing need identified through the chemical dependency and mental health systems, respectively<sup>6</sup>.

Institutional discharge can be a particularly vulnerable time in terms of housing stability<sup>7</sup>. Washington State Department of Commerce's Ten-Year Homeless Plan therefore aims to reduce the proportion of individuals experiencing homelessness following release from institutions<sup>8</sup>. Kitsap Homeless Housing Plan 2012 update has established it a priority to reduce the proportion of individuals experiencing homelessness following release from institutions as well.

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<sup>6</sup> Department of Social and Health Services Research and Data Analysis Division (RDA), *The Status of Individuals Discharged from Behavioral Health Treatment Facilities* (2012)

<sup>7</sup> See, for example: Metraux, Stephan, Thomas Byrne, and Dennis Culhane (2010). "Institutional Discharges and Subsequent Shelter Use Among Unaccompanied Adults in New York City," *Journal of Community Psychology*, Vol. 38(1): 28-38.

<sup>8</sup> Ten-Year Homeless Plan: 2008 Annual Report, <http://www.commerce.wa.gov/site/823/default.aspx>