



COMMUNITY ADVOCATES  
Where Meeting Basic Needs Inspires Hope

## NEWS RELEASE

**NOTE:** For questions or more information about the survey results, contact Janice Wilberg, Wilberg Community Planning LLC, at [jwilberg@wi.rr.com](mailto:jwilberg@wi.rr.com) or call (414) 313-3788.

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# WITH JOBS DISAPPEARING, HOMELESSNESS IN MILWAUKEE JUMPS 13 PERCENT SINCE 2007, NEW POINT IN TIME SURVEY SHOWS

## Length, Frequency of Homelessness Increases; Unemployment Cited As Primary Reason

Milwaukee (Oct. 1, 2009)—Homelessness in Milwaukee has increased 13 percent over the last two years, according to a Point in Time survey of Milwaukee’s homeless citizens conducted earlier this year.

The survey, conducted every two years by the Milwaukee Continuum of Care, is a census of homeless people living on the street and other places not fit for human habitation, as well as those living in emergency shelters and transitional housing programs. On Jan. 28, 70 volunteers counted 1,660 adults and children at emergency shelters and transitional housing programs, meal programs, drop-in centers, libraries, churches, on the street or in encampments in the areas.

Of the 919 adults directly surveyed, nearly 40 percent cited loss of employment and the inability to find work as the primary reason for their homelessness, compared to 28 percent in 2007. When combined with “wages too low,” employment-related reasons represented nearly half (48.7) of the reasons mentioned for homelessness. This despite the fact that 68 percent of unemployed homeless people said they were “willing and able to work,” including 60 percent of unemployed people with disabilities. Seventy-nine percent of those surveyed were unemployed, and 71 percent had been unemployed for six months or more.

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## Homeless Survey / Add One

According to Joe Volk, Community Advocates executive director, homelessness in Milwaukee has likely risen from late-January levels because of the deepening economic recession and increased unemployment throughout the year.

“If we were to conduct this survey tomorrow, I would expect to find that even more individuals and families have been rendered homeless because of the deepening recession and continued unavailability of jobs in Milwaukee,” said Volk. “We don’t have an adequate safety net in place to provide for the families who are losing their jobs.”

“The increase in homelessness documented by the Point in Time Survey confirms what Continuum of Care member agencies have experienced in trying to meet the challenge of providing housing and supportive services with diminishing resources,” said Steve Falek, Associate Director of the Milwaukee Housing Authority and co-chair of the Continuum of Care.

“The increase in the number of Milwaukee’s homeless further strains the capacity on our overextended shelter system,” said Ken Schmidt, executive director of Hope House and chair of the Milwaukee Shelter Task Force. “Unfortunately, the financial support for emergency homeless shelter services has stagnated at the same time demand is rising.”

The spike in homelessness in Milwaukee comes as the number of available jobs in the state is dramatically shrinking. According to a study by the Community Advocates Public Policy Institute, Wisconsin’s job shortage—the number of people who would still be unemployed even if all available jobs were filled—increased from 57,002 in January 2008 to 231,748 in July 2009.

“It should come as no surprise that as jobs disappear, homelessness increases,” said David R. Riemer, director of the Community Advocates Public Policy Institute. “What’s so disheartening is that 68 percent of unemployed homeless people said they were willing and able to work, and yet we don’t have the jobs available to help them pull themselves out of homelessness.”

“The Point in Time represents only a portion of people who are homeless—those who were in shelter or transitional housing or in known locations where they could be counted,” said Janice Wilberg, Wilberg Community Planning LLC. “There are thousands more individuals and families who are homeless at any given time—either doubling up, moving from place to place, or simply being someplace where our counters could not find them.”

Among other survey results:

- Homeless individuals who were interviewed cited 259 instances of having been discharged from an institution within the past six months with no place to live, including hospitals and health care facilities, mental health facilities, jail and the House of Correction, prison, and foster care and group homes. If each instance represented just one person, this would translate into 28 percent of the homeless population having been discharged with no place to live. The problem of institutions discharging people to shelter or to the streets has been recognized across the United States.

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## Homeless Survey / Add Two

- 34 percent of surveyed adults were chronically homeless as defined by the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development; that is, they had a disability and had been homeless for a full year or homeless four or more times in the past three years. This is a significant increase over the 2007 rate of 28 percent.

- 27 percent cited alcoholism and 25 percent drug abuse as the primary reason for their homelessness.

The Milwaukee Continuum of Care is a consortium of 100 homeless service providers, local and state government, business, educational institutions and advocates.

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Center for Urban Initiatives and Research assisted in the survey analysis.

The full report is available for download at the Community Advocates Public Policy Institute Web site, [www.ca-ppi.org](http://www.ca-ppi.org).

Since 1976, **Community Advocates** has provided basic-needs advocacy and services to low-income and at-risk Milwaukee families and individuals by offering more than 30 specialized programs, including health care advocacy, case management, protective payee services and energy assistance.