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## Homelessness up as families on the edge lose hold

By Wendy Koch, USA TODAY

Cities and counties are reporting a sharp increase in homeless families as the economic crisis leads to job loss and makes housing unaffordable.

In Seattle, 40% more people are living on suburban streets. In Miami, calls from people with eviction notices have quadrupled.

"The demand from families with children has increased dramatically," says Robert Hess of New York City's Department of Homeless Services. Each month since September, shelter requests have been at least 20% higher than they were a year ago.

The Department of Housing and Urban Development requires a one-day count in January of people living on the street, in shelters or in transitional housing. National figures have not been compiled.

Of 56 places where figures were available, 35 reported an increase in homelessness; 12 had a drop.

"People who were on the edge can't hold on anymore," says Cathy ten Broeke homelessness project coordinator in Minneapolis and Hennepin County. She says 1,251 families sought emergency shelter last year, up from 1,032 in 2007.

- **In Chicago**, calls to a homelessness prevention hotline were 59% higher in February than a year earlier, says Nancy Radner, head of the Chicago Alliance to End Homelessness. "We're getting requests from people earning more than \$30,000 a year, even \$65,000. That's unprecedented."
- **In Los Angeles**, 620 families used the winter shelter program this winter, compared with 330 families a year earlier, manager David Martel says.
- **In the Phoenix area**, 230 people in families were living on the street in January; there were 49 a year ago. There were 139 children younger than 18 living on the street on their own, according to the Maricopa Association of Governments.
- **In Miami-Dade County**, the number of people calling for help after getting an eviction notice jumped from 1,000 in 2007 to 4,000 last year, David Raymond of the county's Homeless Trust says. "We've beefed up our prevention efforts," he says, so fewer people become homeless.
- **In the Seattle area**, street homelessness increased 2% overall but 40% in the suburbs, where the number living in cars rose from 229 last year to 339, homelessness project director Bill Block says.

Several of the largest cities, including New York and Miami, say their increased efforts to find apartments or shelter beds have meant fewer people living on the street or in their cars.

Hess expects more people to need help this year and looks forward to a sharp increase in federal funding: \$1.5 billion this summer is intended to help struggling people pay their rent, utilities or security deposits so they don't end up homeless.

## Homeless population in major cities

The Department of Housing and Urban Development required every city and county to do a one-day count in January of people living on the street, in shelters or in transitional housing. Not all jurisdictions have reported results yet. A sampling of the findings:

<b>Boston</b>	The homeless count rose 11% from 2007 to 7,681 in 2008, including a jump in the number of people living on the street from 184 to 219. "What we've seen is a significant increase in family homelessness for the fourth consecutive year, says Jim Greene, director of Boston's Emergency Shelter Commission, citing a 23% increase in the number of families in shelters and transitional housing.
<b>Chicago</b>	The city has not released its count. The homelessness prevention hotline received 59% more calls last month than in February 2008, says Nancy Radner, head of the Chicago Alliance to End Homelessness.
<b>Cincinnati</b>	The count was largely unchanged: 1,128 compared with 1,133 a year earlier. "We had really bad weather this year," so a cold-weather shelter was open the night of the count, says Kevin Finn, executive director of the Cincinnati-Hamilton County Continuum of Care for the Homeless. As a result, he says, the street count fell from 55 to 35, but the emergency shelter number rose from 649 to 686. The number of people in temporary apartments declined slightly, he says, because "we don't have enough transitional housing.
<b>Des Moines</b>	The count was 1,129, down slightly from 1,138 a year before. The street count fell from 135 to 58, but the sheltered count rose from 1,003 to 1,071. The number of sheltered families changed little because "there are not a lot of family beds, says David Eberbach, associate director of the Iowa Institute for Community Alliance, a non-profit organization that tracks homelessness. The city has one shelter that will take entire families and one that will take women with children.
<b>Los Angeles</b>	The city has not released its tally, but "there are definitely more families seeking help, says Rebecca Isaacs, executive director of the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority. This winter, 620 families used its winter shelter program, up from 330 families the previous year.
<b>Miami-Dade County</b>	The homelessness count fell from 4,574 a year ago to 4,333 this year because fewer people are living on the street. "Our shelter population is growing, says David Raymond, executive director of the Miami-Dade County Homeless Trust. He says the city is spending more money not only to house the homeless but also to help people stay in their homes. The number of people calling for help after getting an eviction notice jumped from 1,000 in 2007 to 4,000 last year, he says.
<b>Minneapolis-Hennepin County</b>	The county has released only its street count, reporting that it fell from 300 last year to 235 this year. That included 34 unaccompanied youth. The drop was due to greater efforts to shelter the homeless, says Cathy ten Broeke of the Office to End Homelessness in Minneapolis and Hennepin County. "We're seeing more families in our shelters, she says — 1,032 families in 2007 and 1,251 last year.
<b>New Orleans</b>	The city has not finished tabulating, but the number may not mean much, says Martha Kegel, executive director of UNITY of Greater New Orleans, a non-profit group. She says an estimated 5,000 people are living in abandoned buildings, and it's impossible to count them in a 24-hour period. Not all the emergency shelter beds available before Hurricane Katrina in 2005 have been restored.
<b>New York City</b>	The count was largely unchanged: 37,448 this year compared with 37,415 in 2008. The number living on the street fell sharply from 3,306 last year to 2,328 because of increased efforts to provide shelter beds and apartments, says Robert Hess, commissioner of the city's Department of Homeless Services.
<b>Philadelphia</b>	The overall count rose 1% to 6,915, but the street count fell 10% to 457. The city offered overnight cafes, drug treatment beds and other resources, says Roberta Cancellier, deputy director of the Office of Supportive Housing. Those efforts "mitigated what would have been a greater increase, she says. The city saw a 5% increase to 3,561 in the number of people in families with children who were in shelters or transitional housing.
<b>Phoenix-Maricopa County</b>	The county has released only its street count, which shows a 20% increase from a year earlier to 2,918 people. "The biggest change we've seen is with families, says Brande Mead of the Maricopa Association of Governments. The number of people in families on the street rose from 49 to 230 and the number of youth on their own jumped from 40 to 139.
<b>Portland, Oregon</b>	The city has not released its count but expects a slight increase from two years ago despite increased housing efforts, says Sally Erickson, Portland's homeless program manager. She says the recession's effect started showing up a year ago.
<b>Reno area</b>	Its street count fell from 98 in 2007 to 55 in 2009, but the number in shelters or transitional housing jumped from 621 to 859, according to Kelly Marschall, head of Social Entrepreneurs Inc., which coordinates care for the homeless. She says two-thirds list unemployment or job loss as the main reason for their homelessness.
<b>San Antonio</b>	The count fell substantially from 4,063 last year to 3,303 this year, but the difference may be due largely to fewer shelters reporting and a change in methodology, says Mario Resendiz of the Department of Community Initiatives.
<b>Seattle-King County</b>	The county has not released its total. This year's number of street dwellers rose 2% overall but 40% in the suburbs, says Bill Block, project director of the Committee to End Homelessness in King County.
<b>Washington,</b>	The total homeless count rose 3% from 2008 to 6,228. The number of adults on the street fell 15% to 321, but the

**D.C.** number of families in emergency and transitional housing rose 20% to 703.

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