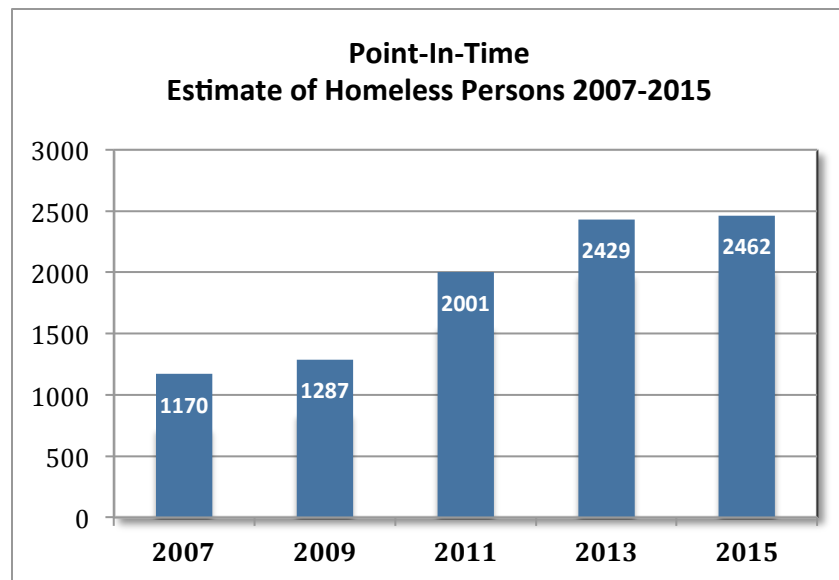


2015 Northwest Arkansas Homelessness Data for Community Health Needs Assessment Mercy Northwest Arkansas

Source: Fitzpatrick FM, Collier S, O'Connor G. *2015 Northwest Arkansas Homeless Report*. Community and Family Institute, University of Arkansas, 2015.

Summary:

Homelessness has been increasing in the United States for decades. Nationwide, an estimated 700,000 people are without their own home on any given night, and as many as 3 million people experience an episode of homelessness each year. Homelessness in Northwest Arkansas is on the rise as well. The 2015 Point-In-Time (PIT) census produced an estimate of 2,462 homeless persons in Benton and Washington Counties. This was a significant increase over the 2007 PIT census of 1,170. The homeless population grew 116% over these 8 years while the general population grew 5%. An increase in child homelessness made up much of this change.



Homelessness in Women and Children:

Homelessness among youth in grades K-12 dramatically increased between 2007 and 2015. 52% of all homeless persons in Benton and Washington counties are less than 18 years old. The school district survey portion of the PIT count identified a total of 1,195 homeless students in addition to 139 children under the age of 6 who were found to be living with a homeless parent. The top 3 school districts with highest levels of homelessness: Bentonville (398); Fayetteville (207) and Siloam Springs (153). Nearly 90% of homeless youth reported doubling up with friends and relatives, the remainder lived in hotels or shelters. Although the "typical" homeless adult is a white male between the ages of 25-54, more than a third of the homeless adult population is female. Among these females, 58% are the parent of at least one child. Northwest Arkansas has limited resources in types of housing available to women and women with children. Even though several facilities have recently expanded their services, a gap in services for women and children remains.

2007 & 2015 POINT-IN-TIME TOTAL COUNT

Data Source	2015	2007
Survey Responses: Homeless Adults and Accompanying Youth		
Adults (18 years and over, responded to survey)	512	285
Youth under 6 living with respondents, not present for survey	139	31
School-Age Youth and Parents/Guardians		
School-age youth reported by school districts	1,195	493
Parents/guardians of youth attending schools*	563	199
Estimate of Invisible Homeless**	53	162
TOTAL NUMBER OF HOMELESS (counted + estimated)	2,462	1,170
Notes		
*Projection of adults accompanying youth enrolled in local schools who reported "doubling up" with friends or relatives.		
**Projection based on survey respondents who reported staying with friends and family.		

Causes of Homelessness:

In-depth interviews identified financial reasons and personal crises as the most commonly cited reasons for homelessness. Homelessness is complicated, many factors usually intertwine, and it is often difficult for homeless persons to articulate why they are homeless. Substance abuse, mental health, lack of affordable housing and employment opportunities are well-known reasons for homelessness but are not often mentioned by homeless people themselves. Research has shown that the roots of homelessness are both structural (wages, employment, affordable housing) and individual (mental illness, substance abuse, relationship issues, and loss of social support).

Health:

56% of homeless adults rated their health as fair or poor. 41% reported times since their homelessness when they needed medical care and did not receive it, most commonly because of lack of money (62%) or lack of transportation (51%). 70% reported at least one disability and more than 50% reported on or more chronic disability. Homeless persons typically have worse health than other populations, including those living in poverty but with established residences. Environmental and social risk factors contribute to this poor health, in addition to high rates of substance abuse, underlying mental health disorders, physical and sexual abuse, violence and victimization.

Physical and Mental Health Statistics:

- 67% are overweight or obese based on their BMI.
- 46% have high blood pressure and 17% have diabetes.
- 58% have been through an alcohol detox program and 46% have had an arrest related to alcohol
- 72% have ever used drugs, most commonly marijuana, and 50% of these have been arrested for drugs
- 63% have a history of mental illness in their lifetime, 62% are currently taking medication for a mental illness, and 58% have been hospitalized for a mental illness.
- 24% have had suicidal thoughts during their homelessness.
- A majority reported an unmet need for dental care.

POINT-IN-TIME CHRONIC & DISABLING CONDITIONS		
Type of Condition	N	%
Substance Abuse (alcohol or drug)	203	39.60%
Physical Disability or Long-term illness	153	29.90%
Mental Illness	225	43.90%
Domestic Violence	90	17.60%
Developmental Disability	37	7.20%
HIV/AIDS	1	0.20%

Other Relevant Facts:

- 28% of all Northwest Arkansas homeless are considered chronic.
- The median duration of homelessness reported was 52 weeks.
- Homeless women are more likely to have children staying with them, are more likely to perceive Northwest Arkansas as dangerous, and are less likely to have worked in the past week. Homeless men were more likely to be veterans and more likely to have ever been arrested.
- Top 10 services needed: transportation, clothing, housing placement services, first aid and medical treatment, medication assistance, job training, food, legal services, deposit assistance, and mental health services.
- Transitional and permanent supportive housing services have expanded in Northwest Arkansas in the last eight years, but a significant gap between need and availability of services remains. The need is especially acute for women and children, particularly if homelessness in children continues to increase as dramatically as it has been.
- A large number of very low-income households in Northwest Arkansas can be defined as “struggling households,” paying a disproportionately large percent of their income in rent.
- Northwest Arkansas lacks sufficient low-income housing to meet the needs of its population.
- 27% of Northwest Arkansas children live in poverty (\$23,850 for family of four) and 50% live in a struggling, “low-income” household (\$47,700 for family of four). (United Way NWA, 2015)

Conclusions and Recommendations from the 2015 Report:

- Homelessness is a costly social problem that impacts individuals and their communities’ physical, psychological, social, spiritual, and economic welfare.
- Early treatment of hypertension, diabetes, and obesity is cost effective, would improve their health and quality of life, and would be an overall cost-saving measure.
- Safe, affordable housing for the poor must be provided in neighborhoods from which the homeless disproportionately come.
- A comprehensive plan with coordination and collaboration among all sectors in NWA is needed to combat homelessness.

“Homelessness is a devastating life circumstance that significantly challenges the wellbeing of persons experiencing it.” (Fitpatrick et al. 57)