

Homelessness in Fargo, North Dakota and Moorhead, Minnesota Highlights from the October 2006 survey

The purpose of this summary is to provide a current snapshot of people experiencing homelessness in Fargo, North Dakota and Moorhead, Minnesota. The information is intended as a resource for planners, policy-makers, service providers, and others who are interested in addressing the problems associated with homelessness.

This study gives a snapshot of the people experiencing homelessness in Fargo, North Dakota and Moorhead, Minnesota on a single day in October 2006. The findings reported here are based on interviews with 251 men and 142 women in emergency shelters, battered women's shelters, transitional housing programs, and in non-shelter locations on Thursday October 26, 2006. This includes 105 interviews with men and 46 interviews with women in Moorhead, Minnesota and 146 interviews with men and 96 interviews with women in Fargo, North Dakota.

Key findings

Numbers of homeless

- On October 26, 2006, there were 342 people (161 men, 99 women, and 82 children) residing in temporary housing programs including emergency shelters and transitional housing programs in the Fargo-Moorhead area. Temporary housing programs in Fargo housed 95 men, 62 women, and 40 children. Temporary housing programs in Moorhead housed 66 men, 37 women, and 42 children.
- Additionally, the October 2006 survey identified 245 persons in informal and unsheltered locations, including 32 children who were not interviewed (93 men, 41 women, and 20 children in Fargo and 59 men, 20 women, and 12 children in Moorhead).

- The total homeless population identified in the Fargo-Moorhead area on October 26, 2006 was 587 persons (351 in Fargo and 236 in Moorhead).
- The number of homeless in 2006 is 49 percent higher than the number found in 2003.

Who is homeless?

- In 2006, men made up the majority of homeless adults in the Fargo-Moorhead area (64% in Fargo and 71% in Moorhead). The average age of homeless men was 44.2 in Fargo and 40.5 in Moorhead. The average age of homeless women was 34.6 in Fargo and 37.7 in Moorhead. Over half of those interviewed have never married (55% in both Fargo and Moorhead).
- Of homeless persons interviewed in Fargo on the night of the survey, 38 percent lived in North Dakota for two years or less. Of those recent residents, 39 percent came to North Dakota from Minnesota, and 33 percent had lived in North Dakota before. Of homeless persons interviewed in Moorhead on the night of the survey, 42 percent lived in Minnesota for two years or less. Of those recent residents, 53 percent came to Minnesota from North Dakota, and 54 percent had lived in Minnesota before.
- Of the women interviewed in Fargo, one-third (32%) had at least one child with them at the time of the survey. In Moorhead, 29 percent of women interviewed had at least one child with them on the night of the survey.
- The homeless population contains a disproportionate number of persons of color, particularly American Indian (26% for Fargo and 28% for Moorhead). While less than 10 percent of Minnesota's and 8 percent of North Dakota's overall population is made up of persons of color, about two-fifths of Fargo-Moorhead homeless adults are persons of color (39% in Fargo and 47% in Moorhead).

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- American Indian women make up more than one-third of the homeless women's population in Fargo (36%) and in Moorhead (38%).
- Over one-third of those interviewed in informal or unsheltered locations were American Indian (Fargo, 34% and Moorhead, 38%).
- Persons interviewed in informal or unsheltered locations were predominantly male in both Fargo and Moorhead (70% and 78% respectively) and over one-third met the federal definition of chronic homeless (36% in Fargo and 43% in Moorhead).
- On the date of the survey, military veterans made up one-quarter (25%) of all homeless persons in Fargo and about one-fifth (19%) in Moorhead. Veterans were 36 percent of homeless males in Fargo and 27 percent of homeless males in Moorhead.
- One (3%) homeless parent in Fargo and one homeless parent (5%) in Moorhead reported they were unable to obtain needed health care for their children in the last 12 months. Two (7%) homeless parents in Fargo and five (24%) homeless parents in Moorhead reported they have been unable to obtain needed dental care for their children in the last 12 months. In both cities, no homeless parents reported being unable to obtain needed mental health care for their children.

Parents and children

- In Fargo, 32 homeless parents had children with them. Eight parents (24%) reported having a child with an emotional or behavioral problem. Of the 17 parents with school-age children, seven (39%) reported that at least one of their school-age children has some type of learning or school-related problem, and three parents (21%) reported having a child that had to repeat a grade in school.
- In Moorhead, 17 homeless parents had children with them. Four parents (19%) reported having a child with an emotional or behavioral problem. Of the 13 parents with school-age children, two (17%) reported that at least one of their school-age children has some type of learning or school-related problem and one parent (9%) reported having a child that had to repeat a grade in school.
- In Fargo, 15 (47%) of the homeless parents reported they were unable to obtain needed child care. In Moorhead, eight (36%) of the homeless parents reported they were unable to obtain needed child care.
- Four (13%) parents in Fargo and three (15%) in Moorhead reported their children had to skip meals in the last month because there was not enough money to buy food.

Education, employment, and income

- About three-quarters of homeless persons had completed at least high school or obtained a GED (80% in Fargo and 67% in Moorhead). About one-quarter (25%) of those interviewed had attended at least some college (30% in Fargo and 18% in Moorhead). About one-quarter of the homeless persons interviewed had received special education services while in school (19% in Fargo and 31% in Moorhead).
- In Fargo, 41 percent of homeless persons interviewed reported having a job, and 15 percent reported working full time. In Moorhead, 31 percent of homeless persons interviewed reported having a job, with 13 percent working full-time.
- For those in Fargo who were not working, the most common barriers were transportation (40%), physical health problems (33%), the lack of housing (27%), mental health problems (19%), criminal history (15%), lack of job experience or history (15%), and lack of resources needed to look for work (15%). For those in Moorhead who were not working, the most common barriers were the lack of housing (38%), transportation (36%), physical health problems (23%), mental health problems (22%), criminal history (16%), lack of job experience or history (15%), lack of resources needed to look for work (15%) and lack of education (15%).
- Sixteen percent of homeless persons interviewed in Fargo and 19 percent in Moorhead reported having no income sources in October. The main source of income for homeless person in both Fargo and Moorhead was day labor (27% in Fargo and 26% in Moorhead) and steady employment (26% in Fargo and 13% in Moorhead).

- The average amount of income that homeless persons interviewed received in October was \$461 (\$449 in Fargo and \$481 in Moorhead) and the median income was \$360 (\$400 in Fargo and \$300 in Moorhead.)
- The average amount that homeless persons interviewed in Fargo could pay each month for their own place to live, including rent and utilities, was \$235, and in Moorhead, the average amount was \$241. About one-quarter of the homeless persons interviewed reported they could not pay anything for their own place to live (22% in Fargo and 25% in Moorhead). The percent of homeless persons who reported they could pay something for rent but not more than \$300 a month was 44 percent in Fargo and 40 percent in Moorhead.

Public assistance and service use

- Ten percent (in both Fargo and Moorhead) of the homeless adults interviewed received family welfare benefits from either TANF (North Dakota's family welfare program) or MFIP (Minnesota's family welfare assistance). Six percent (5% in Fargo and 7% in Moorhead) of the homeless adults interviewed reported that TANF or MFIP was their main source of income in October.
- One-third (33%) of homeless adults interviewed in Fargo reported having some type of medical coverage in October. In Moorhead, closer to half (45%) reported having medical coverage in October.
- About one-fifth (19% in Fargo and 20% in Moorhead) of homeless adults interviewed reported the loss of one or more public assistance benefits during the previous 12 months. Of those reporting a loss of benefits, the benefits most frequently mentioned were Food Stamps (72% in Fargo and 67% in Moorhead) and public medical benefits (39% in Fargo and 52% in Moorhead.).
- When asked about which services they used in October, the services most frequently mentioned by homeless persons interviewed in Fargo were: hot meal programs (57%), clothing shelves (53%), food shelves (39%), free medical clinics (31%), Food Stamps (27%), drop-in centers (25%), and transportation assistance (24%). The services most frequently mentioned by those interviewed in Moorhead were: hot meal programs (52%), clothing shelves (49%), food shelves (37%), Food Stamps (35%), transportation assistance (30%), drop-in centers (28%), and free medical clinics (26%).

Health and well-being

- One common reason for women to seek temporary shelter is to flee an abusive partner. About one-quarter of homeless women interviewed in Fargo (26%) and in Moorhead (24%) indicated that one of the main reasons for leaving their last housing was to flee abuse.
- Close to two-fifths (38%) of homeless adults in Fargo and Moorhead reported physical mistreatment as children (33% of men and 49% of women). Likewise, about one-fifth (19%) reported that they were sexually mistreated as children (7% of men and 42% of women).
- Mental illness is a significant problem among those who are homeless in the Fargo –Moorhead area. Over 40 percent of homeless adults (44% in Fargo and 43% in Moorhead) were told by a doctor or nurse within the last two years that they have schizophrenia, manic-depression or bipolar disorder, some type of delusional disorder, major depression, anti-social personality disorder, or post traumatic distress disorder.
- Forty-three percent of the homeless in Fargo and 50 percent in Moorhead reported that they consider themselves to be alcoholic or chemically dependent. Thirty-one percent of the homeless in Fargo and 46 percent of the homeless in Moorhead reported they have been told by a professional within the last two years that they have a chemical dependency problem. Nineteen percent of homeless persons in Fargo and 25 percent of homeless persons in Moorhead reported receiving inpatient alcohol or drug treatment within the last two years. Twenty-three percent of homeless persons in Fargo and 32 percent of homeless persons in Moorhead reported receiving outpatient alcohol or drug treatment in the last two years.

- Twenty-two percent of homeless persons in Fargo and 29 percent of homeless persons in Moorhead reported having both a mental illness and a chemical dependency problem. This is based on the percent of persons who reported being told by a doctor or nurse within the last two years that they have a major mental illness (schizophrenia, paranoia, manic-depression or bipolar disorder, major depression, anti-social personality or post traumatic stress disorder) and alcohol or drug abuse disorder.
- The main reasons given for leaving home were: not willing to live by parents rules (62%), delinquent activities by the youth or young adult (62%), frequent fighting with parents or guardians (60%), and drug or alcohol use by the youth or young adult (49%).

Serious or chronic disability

- Many homeless adults in Fargo and Moorhead reported serious or chronic disabilities in addition to the mental illnesses, substance abuse problems, and chronic health problems already mentioned. These include physical, mental, or other health conditions that limit the kind or amount of work they can do (38% in Fargo and 40% in Moorhead) or that limit their daily activities (14% in Fargo and 11% in Moorhead), as well as conditions that interfere with memory or daily decision-making (30% in Fargo and 24% in Moorhead).
- When mental illness, substance abuse disorders, chronic physical health problems, and the above disabilities are pooled, three-quarters (77%) of homeless persons in Fargo and in Moorhead have at least one serious or chronic disability. In addition, 34 percent of homeless adults in Fargo, and 30 percent of homeless adults in Moorhead, have a history that suggests likely traumatic brain injury.
- More than four-fifths (85%) of homeless youth or young adults feel they could return home if they wanted to do so, although only about half (51%) think they will ever live with their family again.
- Two-fifths (39%) of homeless youth and young adults reported having a high school diploma or GED. Of those who did not have a high school diploma or GED, over half (54%) were enrolled in a school or in an educational program.
- Over half (52%) reported having attended a program that offers training in life skills or independent living skills.
- Nearly half (45%) of female homeless youth and young adults reported having been pregnant, and over one fourth (27%) of male homeless youth and young adults reported having fathered a child.
- Nearly one-third (32%) of female homeless youth and young adults reported having been approached to work in the sex industry.
- Over three-quarters (78%) of homeless youth and young adults reported having an adult in their life that they trust and have regular contact with.

Changes in the face of homelessness from 2000 to 2006

As part of this year's analysis Wilder Research compared survey information collected in 2000, 2003, and 2006 in order to identify trends and changes in the characteristics of people experiencing homelessness in the Fargo - Moorhead area as well as differences observed between the two cities. The trend analysis is based on changes observed from 2000-2006. Single data point comparisons between cities are for 2006 only. The analysis shows the following:

Homeless youth and young adults

- As part of the October 26, 2006 study, 15 male and 9 female youth, ages 13 through 17, and 18 male and 15 female young adults, ages 18 through 20, were interviewed in the Fargo-Moorhead area. This section is based on their responses.
- For homeless youth and young adults interviewed, their average age the first time they left home to be on their own was 16.2 years old.
- Over half (55%) of homeless youth and young adults had left their home less than six months prior to the survey date.
- Fargo showed an increase in the percent of people employed (35% to 41%); Moorhead showed a decline (35% to 31%).
- Fargo showed a significant decline in the percent of people who have been unemployed for 12 months

or longer (51% to 29). In Moorhead that figure increased (24% to 34%).

- Average income for women in Fargo is trending downward (\$420 to \$373). In Moorhead the trend is upward (\$457 to \$546).
- Average income for men in 2006 is similar in both Fargo and Moorhead (\$490 and \$450 respectively) and has changed little over the three study periods.
- Women with children in Fargo, North Dakota are much less likely to report that their main income is derived from family welfare benefits (5%) than women in Moorhead, Minnesota (21%).
- No one in Fargo reports that General Assistance is a main source of income compared to 9% in Moorhead who report General Assistance as a main source of income.
- 26% of adults in Fargo report that their main source of income is from a steady job compared to 13% of Minnesota respondents.
- A higher percentage of Fargo men who are homeless (36%) report that they are military veterans compared to 27% in Moorhead.
- Thirty-eight percent of the homeless adults in Fargo and 41% of those in Moorhead report that they have lived in their respective states for two years or less. While this figure is much higher than in Minnesota as a whole (23%), much of it is explained by the fluid border between Minnesota and North Dakota where many report that they have simply moved across the river.
- The percent of people who have been homeless longer than a year is up in both cities (34% to 45% in Fargo and 31 to 40% in Moorhead).

- While Fargo shows a decline in the percentage of women who are homeless because of abuse (37% to 26%); Moorhead shows a slight increase (21% to 24%).
- Nearly a quarter of the adults in both cities report that they have no income that they could use for rent (Fargo 22%, Moorhead 25%).
- The use of hot meals programs is up in Fargo (41% to 57%) but down in Moorhead (68% to 52%).
- While about half of the population of adults in both cities report that they are chemically dependent (50% in Moorhead, 43% in Fargo) a declining percentage in both cities report that they have been through a residential treatment program for substance abuse (Fargo 45 to 41%, Moorhead 60% to 54%).
- The percent of people who have been incarcerated within the last two years who are among the homeless population is up in both cities (Fargo 20% to 34%, Moorhead 27% to 33%).
- The percentage of persons reporting serious or persistent mental health problems is up in both cities (Fargo 38% to 44%, Moorhead 35% to 43%).
- About one quarter of all adults in both cities have been hospitalized because of mental illness (Fargo 24%, Moorhead 23%).

The trends described above show an increasing concentration of stress and disability in both cities particularly in areas of incarceration, mental health, and income available for housing. Combined with the fact that the percent of individuals who have been homeless for a year or longer is up in both cities, the data suggests that the identification of permanent housing solutions for those who are homeless today may be more difficult than in previous years.

Wilder Research

www.wilderresearch.org

1295 Bandana Boulevard North, Suite 210
Saint Paul, Minnesota 55108
651-647-4600; FAX 651-647-4623



For more information

This summary presents highlights of the *Homeless adults and their children in Fargo, North Dakota and Moorhead, Minnesota*. For more information about this report, contact June Heineman at Wilder Research, 651-647-4629.

Authors: Greg Owen, June Heineman
SEPTEMBER 2007