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HOMELESSNESS RATE IN LOS ANGELES DECLINES DESPITE TOUGH ECONOMY

New Homeless Statistics Show Aging Population, Increase in Veterans

LOS ANGELES – The Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority released its biennial Greater Los Angeles Homeless Count Report today, revealing that there are an estimated 51,340 homeless persons in Los Angeles County. This figure represents a 3 percent decrease from 2009.

“Given the high unemployment and foreclosure levels over the past two years, as well as the increase in national poverty, there was concern that homelessness would rise but fortunately, that hasn’t happened yet,” said Michael Arnold, executive director of the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority. “This is largely because social service agencies, housing departments and federally funded programs like the Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing Program have effectively helped those who are homeless move into housing and get back on their feet.”

For the City of Los Angeles, the report shows a 9 percent decline in the homeless population since 2009. City officials attribute this decrease to resources that have been dedicated to reducing homelessness, such as setting aside 10 percent of Section 8 vouchers for homeless households, committing to the construction of 2,200 permanent supportive housing units and supporting community development block grant funding.

“To see such a significant drop in our city’s homelessness rate as we emerge from a devastating recession is encouraging news,” said Los Angeles City Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa. “However, there's still a lot more work to be done and it will take an enormous commitment from all of us. From service providers, government agencies and nonprofits, to those of us in government and community leaders, we all must work even harder to continue seeing measured progress in our fight to end homelessness in Los Angeles."

One concern raised by the Homeless Count Report is that many low-income families and individuals are currently precariously housed due to the down economy. They are in danger of becoming homeless if they lose their homes, cannot meet rent, or are forced to no longer "couch surf" with friends and relatives. This could lead to higher numbers of homelessness in future counts.

"Working with local service providers in a public-private partnership has been effective at providing supportive services to the homeless – but this mission is not complete," said Michael D. Antonovich, Los Angeles County Mayor. "We must continue to ensure that vital mental health care services are provided to help our county's homeless live productive lives."

Among the findings in the census report were the following:

- 18 percent of the homeless are veterans, and veterans have a higher rate of chronic homelessness than the general population. Additionally, the report found a 51 percent increase in the number of female veterans on the streets.

- The homeless population is aging, with nearly 34 percent of chronic homeless persons aged 55 or older. This will increase the public cost of homelessness.

- Of the homeless population, 33 percent suffer from mental illness, 22 percent have a physical disability and 34 percent struggle with substance abuse.

The Homeless Count Report found that African Americans comprise 44 percent of the homeless population in Los Angeles County, more than one quarter (28 percent) are Latino and another quarter (25 percent) are white/Caucasian. Asian/Pacific Islander, American Indian and Alaskan Native represent the remainder.

For further information and to obtain a copy of the 2011 Greater Los Angeles Homeless Count Report, visit www.lahsa.org. LAHSA will provide more detailed information in the coming weeks.

About the Greater Los Angeles Homeless Count

The Greater Los Angeles Homeless Count is the nation's largest count of homeless individuals and families, covering approximately 4,000 square miles. The 2011 Homeless Count took place throughout Los Angeles County from Jan. 25-27, 2011 with the support of 4,000 volunteers.

The Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA) coordinates the biennial Greater Los Angeles Homeless Count for the Los Angeles Continuum of Care (LA CoC), as required by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The LA CoC includes all of Los Angeles County, except the cities of Glendale, Pasadena and Long Beach.

About the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority

The Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA) is a joint powers authority of the City and County of Los Angeles, created in 1993 to address the problems of homelessness in Los Angeles County. LAHSA is the lead agency in the HUD-funded Los Angeles Continuum of Care, and coordinates and manages over $70 million annually in federal, state, county and city funds for programs providing shelter, housing and services to homeless persons. For more information, visit www.lahsa.org.

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