Family homelessness in the United States is a phenomenon of immense proportions, a subject begging many questions whose answers lead to still more questions. For these reasons it is difficult to know where to begin contemplating the topic and how to frame a discussion of homelessness that is comprehensive, illuminating, and rich with ideas for alleviating this large and growing crisis.

But a new report is here to help. *The American Almanac of Family Homelessness*, newly available from ICPH, divides this monolithic subject into subtopics. Together, the volume’s articles provide a guide that is both specific and all-encompassing.

Who is homeless, and why? The first of the *Almanac’s* three sections, Issue by Issue, begins with “The Roads Too Often Traveled: Perceived Causes of Family Homelessness.” This article incorporates the findings of city leaders across the country in its breakdown of major causes of homelessness: poverty, unemployment, lack of affordable housing, low pay, domestic violence, mental illness, substance abuse, and the exorbitant costs of medical care. The 20 articles that follow include discussions of the different struggles faced by individual segments of the homeless population, such as minority families, rural families, youth (particularly LGBTQ youth), survivors of domestic violence, and children with learning disabilities.

Where are homeless families? The *Almanac’s* second section, State by State, has an article devoted to each state and the District of Columbia. The articles offer statistics and other information on homelessness as it exists in particular locations across the country. (For example: on a single night in January 2011, there were 919 people in homeless families in Arkansas, while Colorado had more than ten times that number. The governor-appointed chair of the Delaware Interagency Council on Homelessness also serves as executive director of the Homeless Planning Coalition of Delaware, while Illinois has no governor-appointed individual specifically overseeing efforts to combat homelessness; rather, the state’s Affordable Housing Task Force works to secure lower-cost housing for low-income households, including those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.)

What is being done to help? Each of the *Almanac’s* sections addresses this question — Issue by Issue through critiques of the federal government’s approach to combating homelessness, such as the rapid-rehousing initiative, and State by State through its descriptions of regional programs. In addition, the third section, Ideas in Action, turns a spotlight on national, state-level, and local efforts that provide models for reducing homelessness and lessening its negative effects. The “Unique Funding” portion of Ideas in Action lists innovative ways of compensating for reductions in federal funding for anti-
homelessness programs; an example is Georgia’s one-time Homeless Opportunity Fund, which generated $22 million for permanent supportive housing through a rental-car tax. “Early Childhood Development Programs” and “After-school Enrichment Programs” both highlight work being done around the country to narrow the educational gap between homeless children and their housed peers.

The American Almanac of Family Homelessness is an invaluable tool for office holders and seekers, homeless advocates, educators, government agencies and nonprofit organizations devoted to ending homelessness, and all others concerned about this issue. It is a starting point for learning about who needs help, what is being done about it, and what we can still do.