

*The National Perspective*

## Presenting

# *The American Almanac of Family Homelessness*

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.)

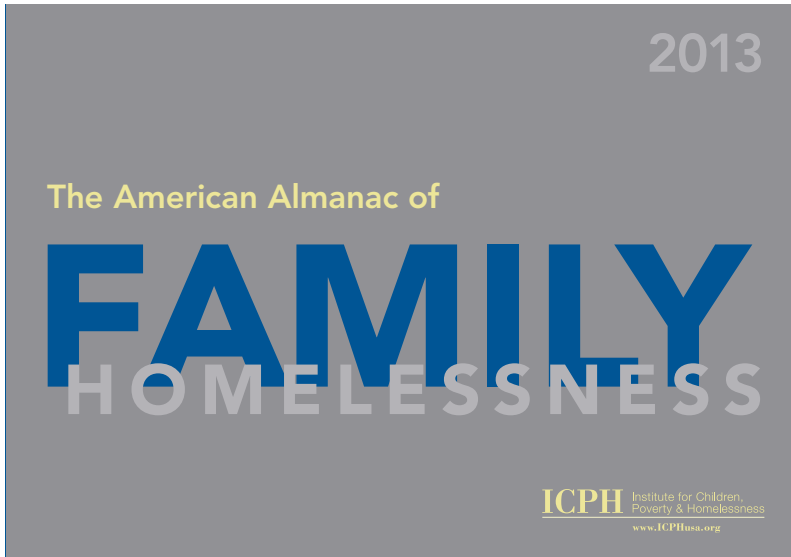
*What is being done to help?* Each of the *Almanac's* sections addresses this question—Issue by Issue through critiques of the federal government's approach to combating homelessness, such as the rapid-rehousing initiative, and State by State through its descriptions of regional programs. In addition, 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-

To download the *Almanac* or access an html version, visit our Web site at [www.ICPHusa.org](http://www.ICPHusa.org).

*The American Almanac of Family Homelessness* is available as of mid-April 2013. To request a print copy of the *Almanac*, email [info@ICPHusa.org](mailto:info@ICPHusa.org).

Interested in attending a workshop regarding content of the *Almanac* or hosting one in your community? Contact Linda Bazerjian: [LBazerjian@ICPHusa.org](mailto:LBazerjian@ICPHusa.org) 212.358.8086 x1204.

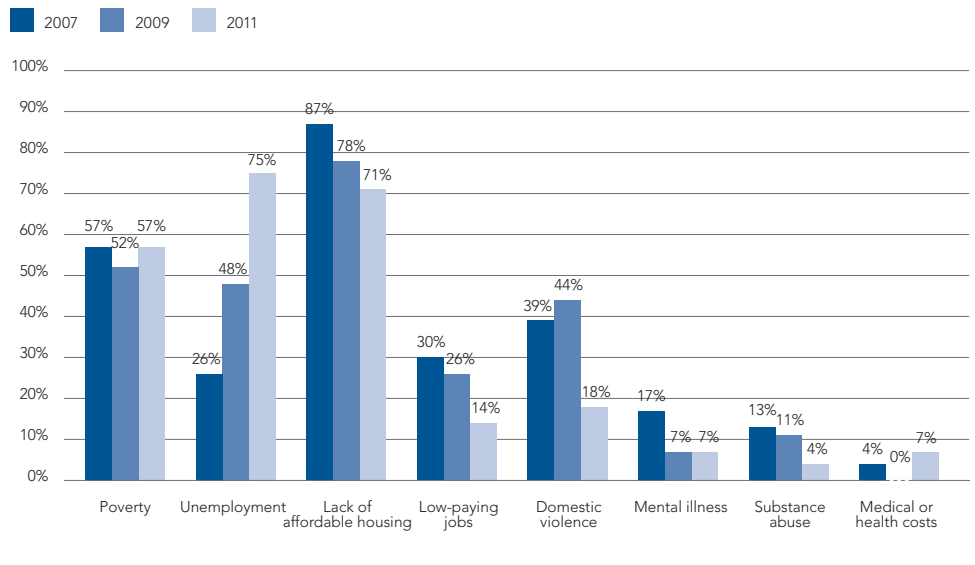
# on the Homefront



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. ■

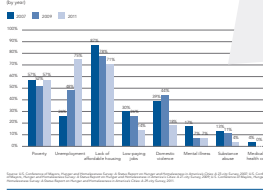
**Figure 1**  
Top Three Causes of Family Homelessness According to City Officials (by year)



**The Roads Too Often Traveled: Perceived**

Despite the official end of the Great Recession (December 2007 through June 2009)—the largest economic downturn since the Great Depression of the 1930s—family homelessness continues to rise. The number of family homelessness shelter stays over the course of a year increased by 40% from 2009 to 2011 and the stays by one million 11.4% over the previous year. In 2011, federal policies have placed emphasis on housing as a solution to homelessness, but the underlying causes of homelessness are not completely understood or addressed by housing alone. The ICPH's *American Almanac of Family Homelessness* serves as the only source of regularly collected data on family homelessness and individual causes of homelessness. In some ways, the report indicates that homelessness has grown in some ways, but that homelessness is not being addressed by housing alone. The 2011 report examines the effect of lack of affordable housing, poverty, and domestic violence on family homelessness, and it explores the role of the report and how it can be used by officials, practitioners and researchers. The report's findings and local level data are needed to understand the causes and unique characteristics of family homelessness. Lack of complete data is a reflection of current federal policy limitations. The majority of federal funding has been on rental or housing benefits, not on other family homelessness programs, regardless of causes for homelessness.

**Figure 1**  
Top Three Causes of Family Homelessness According to City Officials (by year)



**Unemployment**  
Due to the recession, as a result of the recent economic downturn, three quarters (75%) of city officials in 2011 cited unemployment as a leading contributor to family homelessness, compared with just one quarter (25%) in 2007. In 2009, the unemployment rate (10.3%) was the highest it has been since 2003. From 2008 to 2011, the number of unemployed persons in the country increased by 10.9 million (from 89 million to 1.07 million). In 2011, there were more (10.9 million) on the unemployment list than in 2009 (10.3 million) and almost 7 million (6.9 million) more unemployed than in 2007 (4.0 million). The high rate of domestic violence in 2011 was also affected by the recession, which led to more job loss and unemployment. Many unemployed adults have been forced to accept temporary or part-time positions with lower wages and fewer benefits. At the state level, unemployment rates peaked in March 2010, the unemployment rate was 14.3%, compared with 10.3% when the recession began, in December 2007.<sup>14</sup>

Although the loss of a job may not immediately result in housing instability, unemployment can cause families with limited resources to deplete their savings and eventually lose their homes. Homeless working families—those families that by the recession—often lack financial resources or have exhausted their resources, having their particularly vulnerable children in homelessness after all have “checked out” of the “21” system program, implemented in March 2010, had been leading to the loss of 21 months. This type of long-term unemployment or even homelessness to extend families’ savings and cause housing instability.