

Introduction

Family homelessness has challenged the United States for more than three decades. What we know about the impact of homelessness on children and their families has grown tremendously during that time, yet policies and funding priorities still too often overlook the unique needs of homeless families.

The Institute for Children, Poverty, and Homelessness (ICPH) created the *American Almanac of Family Homelessness* in 2013 to contribute to the limited body of literature that informs policies directly affecting homeless families. The updated 2015 edition of the *Almanac* not only compiles the data on family homelessness that is available but also provides the context and analysis necessary to understand the issue. It provides policymakers, government administrators, service providers, advocacy groups, researchers, and concerned citizens with a comprehensive resource that highlights what existing data reveal about homeless families and the programs that serve them—and where gaps exist in knowledge and data collection.

The *Almanac* begins by introducing ICPH's inaugural *State Family Homelessness Rankings*, a resource that evaluates and ranks state performance within two domains: efforts to identify and serve homeless children and youth and the adoption of policies that can prevent homelessness and allow families to regain housing stability. Each domain employs five unique indicators; the results are reported by indicator and as composite education and policy scores, allowing readers to easily compare states and identify areas for improvement.

The state rankings are followed by *State Dashboards*, one for each state and the District of Columbia. These one-page reports—replacing the state-by-state briefs in the 2013 edition—provide a summary table of each state's placement on the state rankings and highlight easy-to-compare statistics on family homelessness. By showcasing trends and statistics through straightforward graphics, the dashboards supply

readers with the data they need to assess the status of family homelessness and related policies in each state.

New to the 2015 edition of the *Almanac* is a section detailing ICPH's *Ideas for Action*. These policy priorities and recommendations are focused on three key areas of family homelessness: education for homeless children, policies supporting homeless families, and research and targeted assistance. They contain cost-effective and practical steps that each state can implement even without federal action. These policy changes would help to mitigate the effects of homelessness by increasing educational opportunities for homeless children, protecting domestic violence survivors, bolstering parents' ability to support their families, and ensuring that research and funding is targeted to effective programs and the most vulnerable populations.

Issue by Issue, the final part of the *Almanac*, contains six thematic sections that explore the challenges that homeless families face and options for interventions. These articles provide in-depth discussions of key topics relevant to the study of family homelessness. Starting with demographics and trends in child and family homelessness, the remaining sections cover the macroeconomic causes of family homelessness; the effects of homelessness on families and children; education for homeless children; federal homelessness policy and types of homelessness housing models; and the role of social safety net benefits in preventing and resolving homelessness.

The *Almanac* demonstrates that the needs of homeless children and families are too varied and complex to ever be effectively addressed with a one-size-fits-all approach. As shown within these pages, strong efforts are being made in many communities but more are needed at the local, state, and federal levels to effectively target, tailor, and fund the services that children and families need to move onto a path of independence.