

National Health Care for the Homeless Day August 12

Overview of the Health Care for the Homeless Program

A homeless person is an individual without permanent housing who may live on the streets; stay in a shelter, mission, single room occupancy facility, abandoned building or vehicle; or in any other unstable or non-permanent situation. A recognition of the instability of an individual's living arrangement is critical to the definition of homelessness. – Bureau of Primary Health Care, DHHS, Health Care for the Homeless Principles of Practice, Program Assistance Letter 99-12

- ✦ In 1987, the **Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act**, Public Law 100-77, was enacted to provide relief to the rapidly increasing homeless population. Title VI of the McKinney Act established the Health Care for the Homeless (HCH) program, the only Federal program with responsibility for addressing the primary health care needs of homeless people. Congress reauthorized the HCH Program in 2002 via the Health Care Safety Net Amendments Act, which was reauthorized again in 2008.
- ✦ The HCH program was modeled after a successful 4-year demonstration program operated in 19 cities by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the Pew Charitable Trust. The demonstration emphasized a **multi-disciplinary approach to delivering care to homeless persons**, combining aggressive street outreach with integrated systems of primary care, mental health and substance abuse services, case management, and client advocacy. Particular emphasis was placed on coordinating efforts with other community health providers and social service agencies.
- ✦ HCH projects and health centers provide their patients with access to **primary care and behavioral health services, treatment of substance use disorders, assistance in accessing housing, Medicaid, and other needed services and benefits.**
- ✦ Programs provide services in a variety of different settings, including **traditional clinic sites, shelter-based clinics, and mobile units.** In addition, they take health care services to locations where homeless individuals are found, such as streets, parks, and soup kitchens.
- ✦ Federal funding for grants to organizations has increased from \$35.7 million in 1990 to **\$191million in 2009.**

According to the 2007 Uniform Data System of the Federal Bureau of Primary Health Care, DHHS, which administers the Health Care for the Homeless Program:

- ✦ HCH program grantees served **776,000 men, women and children** – more than a 10% increase in one year.
- ✦ There are currently **206 HCH program grantees** and hundreds of service sites in all states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico.
- ✦ **70% of homeless people served by HCH grantee projects have no public or private insurance.** For those with known incomes, **91% have incomes at or below 100%of the Federal poverty level.**