

## Facts about... HIV/AIDS in homeless persons

**Summary:** The McKinney Act (Public Health Law 100-628, November 1988) defines a homeless person as: "an individual who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate residence or an individual who has a primary night-time residence that is either a supervised or publicly operated shelter designed to provide temporary or transitional living accommodation; or a public or private place not designed for, or ordinarily used as, a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings."

Homelessness is strongly associated with mental illness and substance use problems, all of which need to be addressed to develop effective prevention and intervention programs for this population.

**Population:** Although there have been no local population-based surveys of HIV infection among homeless persons in King County, studies from other areas of the country indicate homeless men and women are at higher risk for HIV. Homeless persons reported with HIV/AIDS in King County were more likely to be persons of color and to have been exposed to HIV through injection drug use compared to those who were not homeless.

- Approximately 8,000 persons are homeless in King County on any given day, and an estimated 24,000 persons have experienced homelessness in the past year. Unsheltered persons outside of Seattle are the least documented segment of King County's homeless; however, the annual 2008 One Night Street Count included Shoreline, Kent, White Center, Auburn and East King County.
- The 2008 One Night Street Count for King County found 36% of the homeless were single adult men, 13% were single adult women, 50% were families with children and 1% were single youth.
- Homelessness is a particular concern among injection drug users in King County. In a Public Health survey conducted 2002-2004 which recruited IDU ages 15-30, 66% of the participants reported being homeless sometime in the last six months<sup>1</sup>. The National HIV Behavioral Surveillance Survey (NHBS) conducted 2005-2006, found 54% of IDU were currently homeless<sup>2</sup>.

### Status of HIV/AIDS cases (Table 1):

- Among reported HIV/AIDS cases, homelessness is defined as having no residence at time of the HIV or AIDS diagnosis. This definition undercounts the number of homeless HIV/AIDS cases if, for example, a shelter or friend's home was reported as the residence. Two percent (2%) of the 6,283 King County residents living with HIV or AIDS were reported as homeless at the time of diagnosis.
- Among homeless persons with HIV, 49% were persons of color, and 56% were injection drug users (IDU) men who have sex with men and inject drugs (MSM/IDU). This compares to 32% and 13%, respectively, among persons who were not homeless at diagnosis.
- Ninety percent of homeless people with HIV are men, and 10% are women.

### HIV prevalence:

- During the 2008 One Night Count, 107 people accessing shelter and transitional programs were reported as HIV-positive or having AIDS. It should be noted that this is almost certainly an undercount and does not include any people who were homeless and not able to access shelter/housing during the One Night Count.
- The 2007 HIV/AIDS Care Needs Assessment which surveys HIV positive consumers of services found that 8% of respondents reported having been homeless at least once in the past year.

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<sup>1</sup> HIV/AIDS Epidemiology Report, 2<sup>nd</sup> Half 2004, p 20-25

<sup>2</sup> HIV/AIDS Epidemiology Report, 1<sup>st</sup> Half 2007 p. 17-22

**Table 1: King County residents living with HIV or AIDS and presumed homeless (June 2008)**

	Homeless		All cases	
	Number	%	Number	%
<b>Sex</b>				
Male	95	90%	5,659	90%
Female	10	10%	651	10%
<b>Age</b>				
0-19 years	5	5%	144	2%
20-24 years	13	12%	653	10%
25-29 years	11	10%	1,168	19%
30-39 years	39	37%	2,685	43%
40-49 years	30	29%	1,274	20%
50+ years	7	7%	369	6%
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>				
White	51	49%	4,299	68%
African American	31	30%	1,041	17%
Hispanic	15	14%	593	9%
Asian/Pacific Islander	1	1%	197	3%
Am Indian/AK Native	5	5%	86	1%
Multiple or Unknown Race	2	2%	67	1%
<b>HIV Exposure Category</b>				
Male/male sex (MSM)	25	(24)	4,344	(69)
Injection drug user (IDU)	33	(31)	342	(5)
MSM/IDU	28	(27)	531	(8)
Heterosexual sex	6	(6)	601	(10)
Other or undetermined	13	(12)	465	(7)
<b>Total</b>	<b>105</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>6,283</b>	<b>100%</b>

- In the U.S., an estimated 3.5 million people are homeless every year, and as many as 3.4 percent are HIV positive. This rate is three times higher than for the adult population.
- The Medical Monitoring Project, which interviewed people with HIV who are in care from 2005-2008, found that 13% of the participants reported being homeless at some point during the last 12 months.

**Broader issues and data gaps:**

- Tuberculosis (TB) cases among homeless persons increased in King County in 2003. During 2003, 35 cases of TB were diagnosed among homeless persons compared to 30 cases reported in 2002 and 12 cases in 2001. In 2002, 30% were HIV-infected, whereas in 2003 this dropped dramatically to 3%. In 2007, of the 15 homeless TB cases, two (13%) were co-infected with HIV<sup>3</sup>.
- HIV infection is one of many serious issues facing the homeless. The causes of homelessness and its association with mental illness and substance use problems need to be better understood and better addressed in order to develop effective prevention and intervention programs for this population.

Improved characterization of demographics, risk behaviors, and health status (including HIV, other sexually transmitted infections, TB, substance use, and mental illness) among the homeless is also important.

<sup>3</sup> Seattle and King County Annual Tuberculosis Report 2007  
<http://www.kingcounty.gov/healthservices/health/communicable/TB.aspx>