



Oregon Housing and Community Services

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Contacts:

Rick Crager, 503-986-2005, rick.crager@state.or.us

Roberto Franco, 503-986-6732, roberto.franco@state.or.us

Lisa Joyce, 503-986-0951, lisa.joyce@state.or.us

Number of homeless people rises throughout state

Salem – Spiraling unemployment and inability to pay rent are behind a dramatic jump in homelessness throughout the state, according to data released this week by Oregon Housing and Community Services (OHCS).

“The numbers confirm what we already knew, families and individuals can’t afford to pay for one of their most basic needs – a place to live,” said **Rick Crager**, OHCS deputy director.

The number of people in Oregon identified as homeless increased 37 percent from the same time last year, according to the statewide One-Night Homeless Count.

“It’s a new face of homelessness that we’ve not seen before,” said **Corky Senecal**, director of Housing and Emergency Services at Neighbor Impact in Central Oregon, an area hard hit by unemployment and resulting homelessness.

“Last year these people would have read the stories in the paper, watched them on the evening news – and very possibly would have written a check to an organization that helps the homeless,” **Senecal** said. “Today, they are homeless.”

After conducting the one-night count, OHCS’s partners identified 17,122 people experiencing homelessness in January 2009, up from 12,529 people in 2008.

The most dramatic differences between the 2008 and 2009 counts are:

- A doubling in the number of homeless veterans.
- A 100 percent increase in the number of childless couples experiencing homelessness.
- A 150 percent increase in the number of people tallied in the street count.
- More than four times the number of households living in doubled-up situations with friends or family.
- An additional 1,150 people stated they were camping.
- A 32 percent increase in the number of unaccompanied youth.



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In the most recent count, 9,890 individuals – nearly 60 percent of the people identified as homeless – did not receive services or shelter. People in more than 2,000 households are on the streets or living with friends or family. And close to half of households counted had a member with an emotional, mental or substance abuse issue.

“Unfortunately, state resources are shrinking as the need for a strong safety net grows,” said **Crager**, who serves as chair of the state [Ending Homelessness Advisory Council](#) that created the state’s 10-year plan to end homelessness. “A Senate bill to hit the House floor soon will give us some tools to respond more effectively to this challenge.”

SB 200, which was introduced on behalf of OHCS, reorients the state’s response to homelessness. The bill establishes a state policy on homelessness and requires the Department of Human Services and OHCS to better coordinate housing and services. Most significantly, it encourages a focus on permanent housing as the preferred response to homelessness.

Crager encouraged a careful reading of the One-Night Homeless Count data, citing local agency improvements in finding people experiencing homelessness as one of many factors affecting the count.

“There are more homeless on the streets, and we’re better at finding them,” he said, citing homeless numbers rising from 3,294 on the street in 2008 to 8,561 in 2009.

“Weather and other environmental factors can also affect the count’s accuracy,” **Crager** added. “For example, in 2008 snowy conditions impeded the count in rural Oregon. In urban areas, cold weather can attract people to warming centers and other services, making them easier to find.”

Mary Li, manager with Multnomah County’s Department of County Human Services noted that the county opened two family-focused warming centers, close to transportation during the coldest months.

“We believe that this resource was partially responsible for the increase in our numbers served,” **Li** said.

For data by county of the One-Night Homeless Count, visit www.ohcs.oregon.gov/OHCS/pdfs/Summary1_ONHC2009.pdf.

To find your local Community Action Partner, visit www.caporegon.org/members.htm.

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