



# National Student Campaign Against Hunger and Homelessness

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## "Communities In Crisis" Survey of Hunger and Homelessness In America

February 2005

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### Executive Summary

Shamefully, hunger and homelessness are status quo in America today. It is common to see people sleeping on street vents, lined up at a community kitchen, or asking for change on the sidewalk.

However, much remains hidden or unknown. It is true that these problems have existed for decades, but they seem to be getting worse right now. Is that the case all over the country and in all types of communities? If so, why? How can we reverse this trend? There are charities and volunteers dedicated to helping, but can—and should—they do it alone? Government programs help many, but the U.S. and states are cutting billions of dollars from these programs. How is this affecting our communities and low income Americans?

The National Student Campaign Against Hunger and Homelessness created the 2004 Survey of Hunger and Homelessness in America to get the answers to these questions straight from the people addressing these issues on the front lines every day: emergency food and shelter providers. We hope that the results compiled here will bring light to these issues and inspire our elected officials to take action to address hunger and homelessness.

Student volunteers, interns and staff with the National Student Campaign Against Hunger and Homelessness surveyed 900 emergency food and shelter providers in urban, rural, and suburban areas in 32 states and 426 cities and towns. These agencies, run by nearly 45,000 volunteers and 26,000 staff, served 1.3 million clients in the month prior to completing the survey.

We found that many communities are in crisis. Hunger and homelessness are increasing, but government resources are decreasing. Specifically, we found that the number of people requesting emergency food and shelter is increasing in every state surveyed, and in a wide range of urban areas, rural areas, and small to mid-sized towns. However, funding for these programs is inadequate and on the decline, most frequently so from government sources. Many agencies are cutting programs and turning away requests for help due to a lack of resources.

The main findings are as follows:

The number of people requesting emergency food at agencies is increasing.

- 74% of agencies surveyed reported an increase in requests for food assistance over the past year; on average, surveyed agencies reported a 28% increase in requests.

The number of people requesting emergency shelter at agencies is increasing.

- 65% of agencies surveyed reported an increase in requests for shelter over the past year; on average, surveyed agencies reported a 27% increase in requests.

Agencies reported that more people are experiencing hunger and homelessness in their communities than assistance is available.

- 24% of emergency food providers surveyed reported that they turned away requests for food this past year, primarily due to a lack of resources.
- 77% of emergency shelter providers surveyed reported that they turned away requests for shelter this past year, primarily due to a lack of resources.

Many agencies reported funding cuts over the past year; cuts from government sources were most frequent.

- 33% of agencies reported reduced income over the past year; 43% of agencies saw funding cuts from the state government and 35% from the federal government.

A significant percent of agencies that turned away requests for assistance reported a decrease in overall income in the past year.

- 39% of emergency food providers and 43% of emergency shelter providers that reported turning away requests for assistance also reported reduced income this past year.

America has an impressive and dedicated network of emergency food and shelter providers and a strong tradition of philanthropy and volunteerism that supports these agencies. However, the survey results clearly show that communities need help to keep up. Recent increases in people experiencing hunger and homelessness are overwhelming agencies, and cuts in government funding are exacerbating the situation.

The United States is the wealthiest country in the world; our government has access to unparalleled resources that it should put to use to address the community crises of hunger and homelessness. The trend of reduced federal and state spending for social programs is out of sync with reality and impeding communities' ability to alleviate hunger and homelessness. In consultation with agencies and people experiencing hunger and homelessness, government must expand resources to shelters, affordable housing programs, food assistance programs, and other social services that directly serve the lowest income Americans.

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The Campaign is committed to ending hunger and homelessness in America by educating, engaging, and training students to directly meet individuals' immediate needs while advocating for long-term systemic solutions.