

CLERKSHIP GOAL

To understand the causes and consequences of homelessness, including the complex relationship between housing insecurity, health, and substance abuse, and to learn about the resources in the community for affected populations.

POPULATION OF FOCUS

The US Department of Housing and Urban Development defines four broad categories of homelessness:¹

- Individuals and families who are living in a place not meant for human habitation (including an emergency shelter) or are exiting an institution where he/she resided for 90 days or less.
- Individuals and families who will imminently lose their primary nighttime residence.
- Families with children or unaccompanied youth who are unstably housed and likely to continue in that state.
- People who are fleeing or attempting to flee domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, stalking, or other dangerous conditions.

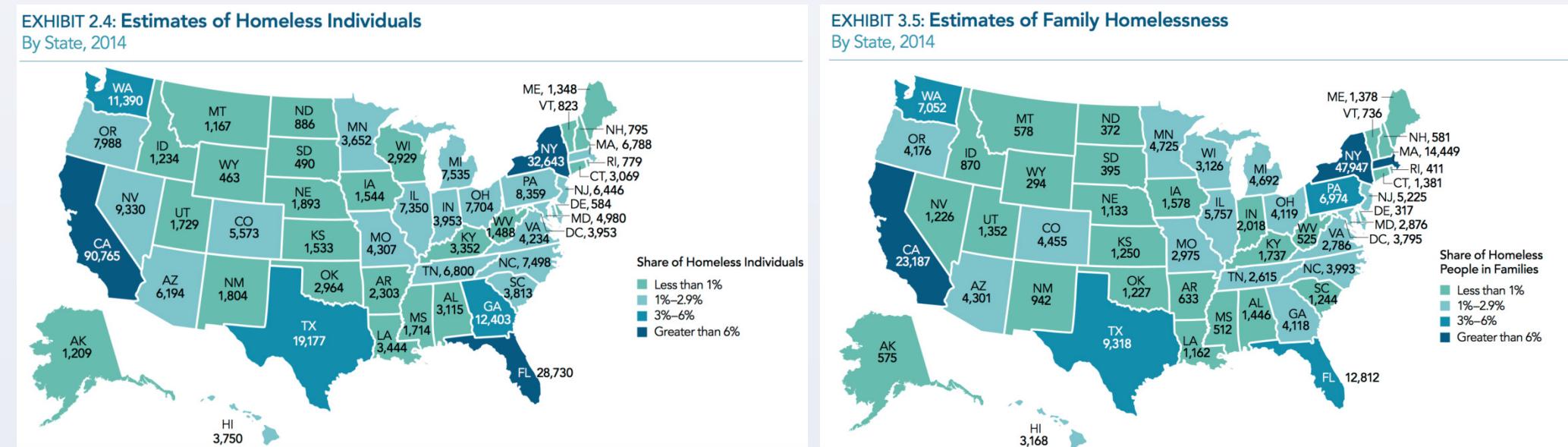
COMMUNITY HEALTHLINK

Community Healthlink (CHL) provides prevention, treatment, and recovery programs addressing mental health, addiction, and homelessness for adults, children and families in Central Massachusetts.

- **Homeless Outreach and Advocacy Project (HOAP)** offers comprehensive services to the region's homeless, including screenings, assessments, counseling, healthcare, rehabilitation, case management, and referral to support systems.
- **Tenancy Preservation Program (TPP)** provides transitional housing and also legal housing support. TPP works with the Housing Court on behalf of individuals whose tenancy problems are related to mental or physical disabilities.

CHL is a member of the UMass Memorial Health Care and is the largest not-for-profit health care system in Massachusetts.²

HOMELESSNESS & SUBSTANCE ABUSE IN WORCESTER



- According to the HUD Point in Time Count Results homelessness is on the rise in Worcester. From 2013 to 2014 the number of homeless people rose 8% - from 1,657 to 1,796. Additionally since 2011 homelessness in Worcester has risen 37%.
- There are about 3,300 families currently in the state's Emergency Shelter units

HOMELESSNESS AS A HOUSING CRISIS

The Housing First Philosophy: The primary need of homeless persons is permanent, stable housing, before other concerns can be addressed. Stable housing is defined as tenancy in a single room occupancy or household, not in shelters or transitional housing.⁴

SERVICE PROJECTS

- Assisted Nurse Practitioner and RNs at St. John's soup kitchen with triaging and directing clients toward desired medical care. Our goal of outreach within the soup kitchen was to engage with people and create awareness about the services available to them.
- We immersed ourselves in Worcester community to experience the various economical and social determinants of homelessness and substance abuse.
- A video was produced with the goal of educating the UMass Community about the homeless population and the challenges they face. This video also served the purpose of allowing us to express our feelings and experiences regarding our work with the homeless population.

LESSONS LEARNED & OUTCOMES

Homelessness is a complex issue. It is the result of many social, individual, and environmental factors. Housing is the first priority in tackling this issue.

Trust is key. CHL's Homeless Outreach Advocacy Project (HOAP) provides services to the population of focus that are free of judgement. As a result of creating a safe environment and a strong rapport, clients are more likely to attend regular appointments and seek multiple levels of care.

"Right to Shelter": MA is the only state that makes it a law to guarantee eligible needy families a roof over their heads. Families with children can be placed in motels in shortage of alternative housing.

COMMUNITY RESOURCES

Important community resources for these patient populations include primary and mental health care, substance abuse treatment, housing services, social and legal services, job placement, and advocacy.

- Homeless Outreach and Advocacy Program and Community Healthlink
- St. John's Soup Kitchen and Mustard Seed
- 25 Queen Street Shelter
- Central Massachusetts Housing Alliance (CMHA)
- Thayer Detox, PASSages, TSS
- Transitional Housing: Dismas, Beryl, Oasis, Spencer, Safe Haven, Hector Reyes

REFERENCES

1. HEARTH "Homeless" Definition Final Rule. Federal Registrar, December 5, 2011: https://www.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/HEARTH_HomelessDefinition_FinalRule.pdf.
2. UMassMemorial Community Healthlink: <http://www.communityhealthlink.org/chl/>.
3. <http://www.endhomelessness.org/pages/rapid-re-housing>
4. http://www.cmhaonline.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=116&Itemid=174
5. http://www.endhomelessness.org/pages/housing_first
6. United States Department of Housing and Development (HUD). The 2014 Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress. 2014. Published online: <http://www.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/2014-AHAR-Part1.pdf>

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank Community Healthlink, the Homeless Outreach Advocacy Program, Leominster Wellness Center, Oasis, Safe Haven, St. John's Church, Dismas House, Spencer House, Hector Reyes House, Beryl House and the 25 Queen Street Shelter. Specifically we would like to thank Dr. Erik Garcia, Jaime Vallejos, and the rest of the HOAP staff for their support in our education as well as Senator Harriet Chandler, Dr. Hugh Silk and Dr. Matilde Castiel.