



Coalition on Homelessness
and Housing in Ohio

Beyond the Data: COHHIO Issues Brief

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Beginning this month, COHHIO will release periodic briefs focused on topics pertaining to homelessness and affordable housing. Utilizing data and experiences from select Ohio communities, these briefs will explore the issues in more depth and review possible policy solutions.

Summary Findings

- Ohio families are increasingly vulnerable, facing growing unemployment and poverty.
- Ohio families entering shelters report decreasing monthly income and more complicated situations overall, including higher rates of underemployment and unemployment.
- Yet, Ohio communities are largely not reporting increases in family homelessness.
- Local experts report that the Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing Program (HPRP), has had a significant and positive impact on homelessness in their communities.

HPRP: Background

Signed into law in February 2009 as part of the response to the greatest economic crisis since the Great Depression, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) provided \$1.5 billion in funding to create the national Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing Program (HPRP). This program was included in ARRA to help facilitate economic improvement and job creation, and to allay growing concerns that homelessness would increase as poverty and unemployment rates grew.

In Ohio, HPRP programs began operating in earnest fall of 2009. Through the provision of limited financial assistance and supportive services, the primary goals of HPRP are to prevent households from becoming homeless and/or help those who are experiencing homelessness to be quickly re-housed and stabilized.¹ Ohio received \$65,653,996 in HPRP funds to be spent within three years. Every geographic area of the state is covered in some fashion by an HPRP.

Impact of the Recession on Ohio: The Case for HPRP

Between 2008 and 2009 the nation experienced increasing unemployment and enrollment in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), also known as food stamps, two primary indicators of a declining economy and rising poverty.² Nationally, unemployment increased from 6.7% in November 2008 to 10% in November 2009. Enrollment in SNAP grew to over 38 million from just over 31 million in November 2008, a 22.8% increase.³

In Ohio, the economic picture is even bleaker. Ohio, which ranked 38 out of 51 states/territories, had an unemployment rate in December 2009 of 10.9%⁴, an increase of 3.5% from December 2008 (7.4% unemployment),⁵ and almost a full percentage point higher than the national rate. Between November 2008 and November 2009, Ohio experienced a 26% increase in SNAP enrollment,⁶ significantly higher than the national increase of 22.8%.

Taken together, rising unemployment and increasing enrollment in SNAP indicate that Ohio families are facing unique economic crises and becoming increasingly vulnerable. As mentioned above, these negative economic indicators and fear of potential increases in homelessness prompted the current administration and Congress to pass ARRA, including the \$1.5 billion for HPRP nationwide.

HPRP and Homelessness in Ohio Communities

To get a sense of the impact of HPRP resources on Ohio communities and residents in these particularly dire economic times, COHHIO collected information on homeless families from homeless data systems (HMIS) and from diverse local experts. Data collection was focused on the time periods 9/1/08 – 11/30/08 and 9/1/09 – 11/30/09; the time period during which HPRP was implemented in Ohio communities (2009) and one year prior.

Of the six communities for which data/information were collected, only Cincinnati reported a slight increase

¹ U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. (2009, March 19). *Notice of Allocations, Application Procedures, and Requirements for Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing Program Grantees under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009*. Retrieved from <http://hudhre.info/HPRP/index.cfm?do=viewHPRPIssuances>. Washington DC: Author.

² SNAP/food stamps enrollment very closely tracks poverty rates and unemployment, thus making it a very accurate and timely indicator of changes in poverty. Although the Census Bureau also reports on poverty rates, these data are only released annually, making it impossible to find explicit and accurate poverty data mid-cycle. For more information, see: <http://www.cbpp.org/cms/index.cfm?fa=view&id=2226>

³ Retrieved from <http://www.fns.usda.gov/pd/29SNAPcurrPP.htm>

⁴ Retrieved from <http://www.bls.gov/web/laumstrk.htm>

⁵ Retrieved from <http://www.bls.gov/web/laumstch.htm>

⁶ Retrieved from <http://www.fns.usda.gov/pd/29SNAPcurrPP.htm>



in homeless families entering shelters and transitional housing (TH) during the identified time period in 2009, serving 28 more families in 2009 than 2008. Every other community reported a decrease in families entering shelter/TH, from 2 fewer families in Columbus to 12 fewer in Richland County. Similarly, local experts largely reported that providers in their communities were seeing declining demand for shelter among homeless families. Licking County was the notable exception; local experts indicated that although numbers of homeless families in shelter/TH decreased significantly between 2008 and 2009, their shelter had been at capacity all year and they were seeing greater requests for general assistance.

Decrease in Family Income

These six Ohio communities also largely reported decreases in families' income at shelter entry between 2008 and 2009. In Marion and Licking Counties, for example, households reported an average of \$300 less in monthly income in 2009. The only communities that experienced an increase in monthly household income at program entry reported a minimal \$15 - \$20 average increase. Moreover, local experts all indicated that providers were generally reporting decreases in household income in 2009 and that families presented with more complicated issues/situations overall, including higher rates of underemployment and unemployment.

Increase in Family Need

So what does this contradictory information mean? Increasing unemployment rates and increased enrollment in SNAP indicate that the economic situation has worsened since 2008 – for Ohio, these indicators paint an even bleaker picture, as the state's unemployment rate is higher than the nation's and enrollment in SNAP has increased at a higher rate as well.

At the same time, the most recent estimates collected of homeless families do not show increases in families entering emergency shelters or transitional housing, even though it appears that their

household situations are more shaky (i.e. lower average household income, higher unemployment).

When asked this question directly, local experts almost unanimously agreed that the Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing Program (HPRP), has had a significant and positive impact on homelessness in their communities. Specifically, HPRP has prevented homelessness for many individuals and families that would otherwise have been forced to enter shelter and it has helped quickly end homelessness for households already in shelter. For some communities, this is the first time they have had significant local resources to provide limited rental assistance and supportive services. For others, HPRP has helped them bring existing programs to scale and allowed them the opportunity to refine practices, making their work more efficient and effective.

Expanding HPRP to Help Vulnerable Households and the Economy

The resources provided to communities through HPRP must be spent within three years of program implementation, effectively terminating HPRP by 2012. However, early reports have made clear that the need for this assistance is already far exceeding available resources.⁷ Experts believe this has resulted, in part, because ARRA, including the resources for prevention and re-housing, was passed based on economic conditions/projections that have since worsened. To help address this unmet need and to ensure that HPRP resources are available throughout the duration of the recession, ***it is critical that Congress provide an additional \$1 billion in funding.***

The Call for Continued HPRP Funding

The U.S. Senate will release its version of a jobs-creation bill any day now, and it is imperative that our elected officials include additional funding for HPRP in their legislation. By doing so, Congress can help address the significant need for

HPRP resources in our communities and at the same time create and preserve jobs. Implementation of HPRP in 2009 alone directly created 2,500 jobs by facilitating the hiring of agency HPRP-specific staff.⁸ Thus, expansion of HPRP may have a similar effect on the direct creation of additional jobs. Moreover, every additional \$1 spent on rental assistance is predicted to generate up to \$2 in additional economic demand, which has the indirect benefit of contributing to job creation and preservation as well.⁹

Providers as Advocates

To ensure that HPRP expansion becomes part of a forthcoming jobs bill, Ohio HPRP and homeless services providers should contact their Senators and Representatives and express their desire to provide an additional \$1 billion in funding for the program. Providers and advocates can make their case by sharing their unique stories about how HPRP has assisted vulnerable and homeless households in their communities. You can also contact COHHIO and ask to be included on any correspondence related to coordinated, statewide HPRP expansion advocacy.

COHHIO's research for this brief focused on the experiences of Columbus, Cincinnati, Youngstown, Marion County, Richland County, and Licking County. The communities were chosen because of their geographic and economic diversity.

⁷ National Alliance to End Homelessness (2009, December 8). *Jobs Bill Recommendation: Include an Additional \$1 Billion for Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing*. Washington DC: Author.

⁸ National Alliance to End Homelessness (2009, December 8). *Jobs Bill Recommendation: Include an Additional \$1 Billion for Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing*. Washington DC: Author.

⁹ Rice, D. (2009, December 15). *Options for Jobs Legislation: Providing \$1 Billion to Prevent Homelessness*. Washington DC: Center on Budget and Policy Priorities

