

Homeless

Estimating the number of persons who are homeless is a challenging task given the mobility of this population. One approach used to estimate the size of the homeless population is to conduct point-in-time surveys where, on a designated night, groups across the country count the number of persons living on the streets and in shelters. According to a national point-in-time study conducted in January 2013, there were 610,042 persons experiencing homelessness in the United States (HUD, 2013). In Illinois, on the same date, there were 13,425 homeless individuals counted (HUD, 2013). Because people move in and out of homelessness, the overall number of people who experience homelessness annually is higher.

No recent systematic studies have been conducted to estimate the prevalence of HIV disease among the homeless in the U.S. Several small studies have shown higher HIV disease prevalence and a high rate of risk factors in this population including illicit drug use, increased high-risk sexual behavior, and mental health issues (Wolitski, Kidder, & Fenton, 2007).

Persons living with HIV disease need regular health care visits and access to medication. This can be a challenge for people experiencing homelessness who can face barriers to health care access such as inadequate health insurance coverage, limited transportation, and lack of identification (Institute of Medicine, 1988; Milloy, Marshall, Montaner and Wood, 2012). Furthermore, persons who are homeless experience stress, depression, and other psychological factors that may reduce treatment adherence (Blashill, Perry, & Safren, 2011).

The Medical Monitoring Project, a CDC-funded supplemental surveillance activity to learn more about the experiences and needs of persons living with HIV disease, includes a question about history of living on the street (CDC, 2015). In 2012, an estimated 5% of survey respondents reported living on the street in the past 12 months (IDPH, 2012). Because survey participants only included persons receiving HIV care, this is likely an underestimate of unstable housing among all persons living with HIV disease in Illinois.

The Housing Opportunities for Persons Living with AIDS (HOPWA) Program is the only Federal program

dedicated to the housing needs of persons living with HIV/AIDS. Under the HOPWA program, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development makes grants to local communities, states, and nonprofit organizations for projects that benefit low-income persons living with HIV/AIDS and their families (HUD, 2014).

In Illinois, the HOPWA program provides assistance with payment of utilities and short-term rent and mortgage assistance to persons living with HIV disease. In 2013, 315 of 4,401 Ryan White Part B clients served in Illinois received assistance with housing services through the HOPWA program.

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