

# People Need Health Care.

-Everyone should have access to comprehensive, quality, and affordable health care.

**For people struggling to pay the rent, a serious illness or disability can start a downward spiral into homelessness, beginning with a lost job, depletion of savings to pay for care, and eventual eviction.**

- Over 41 million Americans have no health care insurance (U.S. Bureau of the Census 2002).
- Nearly a third of persons living in poverty have no health insurance of any kind.
- The coverage held by many others will not carry them through a catastrophic illness.
- The number of uninsured persons seeking treatment is increasing: overall, Health Care for the Homeless programs report a 35% increase in the numbers of their patients who are uninsured (O'Connell, J., Lozier, J., and Gingles, K., 1997).

**Homelessness severely impacts health and well-being. The rates of acute health problems are extremely high among people experiencing homelessness.**

- With the exception of obesity, strokes, and cancer, people experiencing homelessness are far more likely to suffer from every category of severe health problem.
- Conditions which require regular, uninterrupted treatment, such as tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS, diabetes, hypertension, addictive disorders, and mental disorders, are extremely difficult to treat or control among those without adequate housing.
- Housing is the first form of treatment for people experiencing homelessness with medical problems, preventing many illnesses and making it possible for those who remain ill to recover. Lack of affordable housing makes it more difficult for people to recover.

**Children without housing experience numerous health problems that impact their development.**

- Children without a home are in fair or poor health twice as often as other children, and have higher rates of asthma, ear infections, stomach problems, and speech problems (Better Homes Fund, 1999).
- They also experience more mental health problems, such as anxiety, depression, and withdrawal. They are twice as likely to experience hunger, and four times as likely to have delayed development.
- In New York City, 61% of children without housing had not received their proper immunizations (compared to 23% of all New York City two-year-olds).
- 38% of children in New York City's shelter system have asthma (an asthma rate four times that for all New York City children).
- In New York City, children without housing suffer from middle ear infections at a rate that is 50% greater than the national average (Redlener and Johnson, 1999).
- These illnesses have potentially devastating consequences if not treated early.

**Universal access to affordable, high-quality and comprehensive health care is essential in the fight to end homelessness. A health insurance system could reduce homelessness and, more significantly, help to prevent future episodes of homelessness.**

## Sources:

Better Homes Fund. *Homeless Children: America's New Outcasts*, 1999. Available, free, from the Better Homes Fund, 181 Wells Avenue, Newton Centre, MA 02159; 617/964-3834.

O'Connell, J., Lozier, J., and Gingles, K. *Increased Demand and Decreased Capacity: Challenges to the McKinney Act's Health Care for the Homeless Program*, 1997. Available from the [National Health Care for the Homeless Council](http://www.nhchc.org), P.O. Box 68019, Nashville, TN 37206 8019; 615/226-2292, [www.nhchc.org](http://www.nhchc.org).

Redlener, Irwin, MD and Dennis Johnson. *Still in Crisis: The Health Status of New York's Homeless Children*, 1999. Available from [The Children's Health Fund](http://www.childrenshealthfund.org), 317 East 64th Street, New York, NY 10021; 212/535-9400.

U.S. Bureau of the Census 2002. Available at [www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov).