

## **Report: Number of homeless family members doubles in Massachusetts**

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FRAMINGHAM — The number of homeless people in Massachusetts rose sharply over the last seven years, driven by a rise in families living in shelters or transitional housing, according to new data released by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

A HUD report released Thursday indicates that Massachusetts experienced an estimated 40 percent increase in the homeless population since 2007. The percentage increase was higher in Massachusetts than in any other state, according to the new data, which showed that the homeless population fell nationwide by more than 10 percent during the same period.

In Massachusetts, the most significant gains came in the category of homeless people in families. While the number of homeless individuals in the state has declined, the number of homeless people in families has more than doubled, rising from an estimated 6,835 people in 2007 to 14,449 this year.

The new data was released in HUD's 2014 Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress. It reflects an estimate of the homeless population across the country based on the number of homeless people living both in and out of shelters on a single night at the end of January.

One factor contributing to the increase in homelessness in Massachusetts is the high cost of housing, said Jerry Desilets, director of policy, planning and community relations for the South Middlesex Opportunity Council. Real estate prices have risen sharply around Boston, displacing some families who can no longer afford to pay rent. Desilets said the same trend is evident elsewhere in the state.

"Housing prices in MetroWest are also high, so finding family units for people in the MetroWest area is perhaps almost as daunting," he said.

Relatively few families in Massachusetts are living on the streets, according to HUD, which determined that nearly all homeless people in Massachusetts are “sheltered,” meaning they are staying in emergency shelters or transitional housing programs. Massachusetts has a “right to shelter” law, which guarantees homeless families a place to stay once they qualify for emergency assistance.

Around MetroWest and Milford, SMOC administers family housing programs on behalf of the state Department of Housing and Community Development. The organization helps 100 to 150 families living in congregate housing or single-family units in the area, Desilets said.

“The rise in family homelessness in Massachusetts has been substantial, and in our area, the number of families in the last year would have increased probably by 15 to 20 percent,” he said.

HUD’s latest assessment found 578,424 people homeless across the country on a single night in January. While most were staying in residential programs for homeless people, about one third were in “unsheltered” locations, including vehicles and the outdoors.

About half of the country’s homeless population was concentrated in just five states: California, New York, Florida, Texas, and Massachusetts, which is home to an estimated 21,237 homeless people, or about 4 percent of the country's homeless population.

“As a nation, we are successfully reducing homelessness in this country, especially for those who have been living on our streets as a way of life,” U.S. Housing and Urban Development Secretary Julián Castro said in an announcement. “There is still a tremendous amount of work ahead of us but it’s clear our strategy is working and we're going to push forward till we end homelessness as we’ve come to know it.”

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