

Anchorage Homeless Chronic Public Inebriate: An Overview

Homeless versus Homeless Chronic Public Inebriate

The issues of chronic public inebriation and homelessness are often perceived by the public as one in the same, but while they may have related issues, overall they include different demographics with distinct needs and different solutions.

According to the Alaska Homeless Management Information System and Alaska Housing Finance Corporation, the overall estimated homeless population (homeless - according to HUD definitions*) was 2,962 individuals as of January, 2009 (based on a single-night count). The Anchorage School District calculates that nearly 1,176 of those homeless are children¹.

Out of the single-night count 399 of the 2,962 homeless individuals claimed to be chronic alcoholics or substance abusers. This is a 38% increase from homeless chronic inebriate population estimates by UAA/BHRS in 2005².

Homeless Chronic Public Inebriate Activity Trends

The Anchorage Fire Department has collected data from the Community Service Patrol & Transfer Station (CSP&TS) and published the results in a *Summary and Analysis Report*³. This report is the most accurate source of information that the Municipality Of Anchorage has for assessing trends related to homeless chronic public inebriates.

This analysis shows that the activity at the CSP&TS has risen significantly in the past year.

| Activity | 2007 | 2008 | Change 2007 - 2008 |
|---------------------------------------|--------|--------|--------------------|
| # CSP dispatch calls responded to | 20,703 | 23,396 | >13% |
| # Sleep-Off client intakes | 20,463 | 23,104 | >13% |
| # Unduplicated clients served | 3,308 | 3,451 | >4% |
| Average intake breath alcohol measure | .217 | .277 | >3% |

Data reported by CSP&TS, also reveal a change in individual frequency of use between 2007 and 2008 at the Transfer Station.

| Individual's Frequency Of Use | # Of Clients 2007 | # Of Clients 2008 | # Intakes 2007 | # Intakes 2008 |
|-------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|----------------|----------------|
| 1 Intake | 1,955 | 1,867 | 1,955 | 1,867 |
| 2-4 Intakes | 672 | 778 | 1,738 | 2,028 |
| 5-10 Intakes | 286 | 332 | 1,973 | 2,284 |
| 11-29 Intakes | 193 | 277 | 3,243 | 5,082 |
| 30-72 Intakes | 151 | 146 | 6,346 | 6,475 |
| 73-197 Intakes | 51 | 51 | 5,208 | 5,368 |
| Totals | 3,308 | 3,451 | 20,463 | 23,104 |

*The US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) defines "homeless" as "those who lack a fixed, regular, adequate nighttime residence, including persons whose nighttime residence is a supervised public or private shelter designed to provide temporary living accommodations."

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Homeless Chronic Public Inebriate Demographics

Overall, the gender of those served at CSP&TS in 2008 was: 78% male and 22% female. The ethnicities served at CSP&TS in 2008 were: 85% Alaska Native/American Indian; 12% Caucasian/White; 0.1% Black; 0.1% Hispanic; 2.8% Asian/Other/Unknown.

The Cost

Individuals who are homeless chronic alcoholics/substance abusers cost citizens of the Municipality of Anchorage and the community at large an increasingly high amount in money and resources each year. A breakdown of some of the costs for an individual is as follows:

One meal at Downtown Soup Kitchen¹¹ - \$2.00
A day at Bean's Café¹² - \$10.00
A night at Catholic Social Services Brother Francis Shelter⁴ - \$17.49
An intake at the CSP-Transfer Station⁵ - \$65.00
A day in an emergency room bed⁷ - \$101
A night in Jail or Prison⁶ - \$126.04
A day with a case manager¹⁰ - \$180.00
A day in a residential treatment bed⁸ - \$250.00 - \$375.00
A day in a detox bed⁹ - \$400.00 - \$500.00

Exact costs to society are challenging to calculate, such as the cost for APD to respond whenever they get a "man down" call, which may be an individual sleeping on the ground and supersedes all other dispatches, including suspected robberies, rapes, etc. Or, businesses that may be affected in ways such as, having to use company time to clean up the parking lot littered with empty liquor bottles.

Increased Crime Rates

In addition to the escalating trend that Anchorage has seen year-after-year with the homeless chronic public inebriate population, the APD Special Victims Unit (SVU) has seen an increase within the past year of reported sex crimes. Most sexual assaults have involved individuals (both victim and suspect) who are extremely intoxicated from alcohol and who are often homeless.

Conclusion

The issues of homeless chronic public inebriates, is not new to Anchorage. Rather than managing or simply reacting to these issues, the goal needs to be to end chronic alcohol/substance abuse and homelessness in our city and our community. To accomplish those ends requires working to: 1) Reduce deaths amongst chronically homeless inebriates 2) Reduce violence to and among the chronically homeless inebriates and 3) Reduce neighborhood impact from chronically homeless inebriates¹³.

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¹2008 estimate from Anchorage School District.

²The Chronic Inebriate Problem in Anchorage Brief Overview, July 2, 2007, MOA/DHHS, CW Floyd.

³<http://www.muni.org/departments/fire/operations/documents/2007%20csp%20report.pdf>
<http://www.muni.org/departments/fire/operations/documents/csp%20data%20draft%202008.pdf>

⁴2009 estimate from Catholic Social Services, Brother Francis Shelter.

⁵2008 estimate from Anchorage Fire Department, Community Service Patrol & Transfer Station.

⁶2008 estimate from the State of Alaska Department of Corrections.

⁷2007 estimate from Providence Hospital.

⁸2008 estimate from Cook Inlet Tribal Council, Ernie Turner Treatment Center.

⁹2008 estimate from Cook Inlet Tribal Council, Ernie Turner Treatment Center.

¹⁰Need for Change: Cost-Effective Solutions to Homelessness, September 2008, Anchorage Coalition on Homelessness.

¹¹2008 estimate from Downtown Soup Kitchen.

¹²2009 estimate from Bean's Café.

¹³Chronic Public Inebriates and Related Issues of Homelessness, The Mayor's Strategic Action Plan, 2008.