

## HOMELESSNESS

Homelessness is a problem in every major city in California, as well as in many rural areas. California's streets, malls, beaches, parks, and riverbanks are rife with people who for one reason or another do not have permanent places to live. The homeless problem stems from many sources including high housing costs, unemployment, alcoholism, drug addiction, reduced services for the mentally ill, reduced federal housing funds, as well as conversions of federally subsidized housing to market rates.

Despite the acknowledgment by many in government, the media, and the private sector of the problems of homelessness, there is neither agreement on how best to attack the problem nor significant public money with which to fight it. In large part, the battle against homelessness is being fought by church groups and other non-profit organizations with volunteers, donations, and a trickle of government funds.

Many cities have enacted stiff anti-camping and panhandling ordinances in response to outraged citizens and business owners who demand a "get-tough" approach to the problem.

Thirty seven percent of the homeless in California have families, 38 percent have problems with alcohol, 39 percent suffer from mental illness, and 26 percent have a drug problem.

The number of homeless people in California is difficult to estimate. Since a person can be homeless for days, weeks, months, or years, the homeless population is in constant fluctuation. However, according to the latest data from Housing California, California is meeting only a fraction of the need for emergency shelters. On any given night, there are approximately 185,000 homeless individuals and 105,000 homeless families. About 1 in 6 individuals and 1 in 5 families may have a bed.

To address the wide array of needs for the homeless, the state and federal government provide services to the homeless through a complicated array of agencies, departments, and programs which focus on either emergency shelter and services or narrowly-focused programs that address specific subgroups of the homeless population.

In the spring of 2002 the Governor created the Interagency Task Force on Homelessness to study and recommend solutions for integrating services provided by the numerous departments and agencies.

### **Federal and State Housing Programs**

- 1) Emergency Housing Assistance Program (EHAP):** Operated by the state Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD), EHAP provides grants to local service providers who offer temporary emergency shelter to the homeless. Grants may be used for the acquisition and renovation or expansion of existing facilities, general maintenance costs, and limited administrative expenses. The

Budget Act of 2000 appropriated \$35 million to EHAP. Proposition 46 if approved by the voters at the November 5, 2002 statewide general election will provide \$195 million to EHAP.

- 2) **Federal Emergency Shelter Grant Program (FESG):** FESG provides grants to local public agencies and nonprofit organizations in small communities that do not receive emergency shelter funds directly from HCD, to provide shelter and transitional housing for homeless individuals and families. FESG grants are used for facility conversion, rehabilitation, maintenance, operating costs, rent, and supportive services such as transportation, legal aid and counseling for the homeless.