

20. Homelessness

What It Is

The estimated number of homeless individuals is derived from the Contra Costa County Continuum of Care Plan, which is updated annually. Shown below is the number of homeless persons in families with children needing emergency shelter on any given night (estimated need) compared to the number of beds/units available for these families (current inventory). Because the figures represent an estimated need, and do not include methods such as an empirical census, the numbers below should be considered a conservative estimate of the number of homeless people in Contra Costa County.

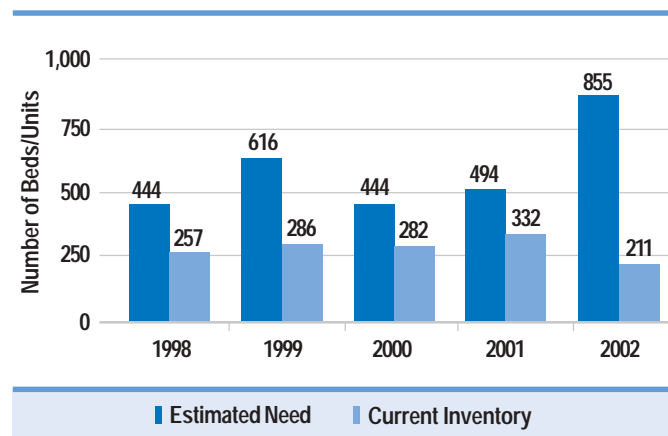
Why It Is Important

An increasing proportion of the homeless population is the working poor. The continuing decrease in housing affordability may result in increased numbers of individuals who are homeless, living in overcrowded conditions, or precariously housed. The number of homeless children and families provides a telling indicator of family well-being in the county.

How We Are Doing

The number of people in homeless families needing emergency shelter services on any given night almost doubled from 444 in 1998 to 855 in 2002, while the number of shelter beds decreased by 18% from 257 to 211 over this period. Although there is no census of the total number of homeless, according to the *2001-2006 Contra Costa County Homeless Continuum of Care Plan*, “each night in Contra Costa County, at least 4,829 people are living on the streets or in temporary accommodations, such as an emergency shelter or on a friend or relative’s couch. The majority are members of a family. Almost half are children.”

Figure 20.1 — Contra Costa County Estimated Need for Family Emergency Shelters Compared to Available Beds/Units



Source: Contra Costa County Homeless Continuum of Care Advisory Board, *2001-2006 Contra Costa County Continuum of Care Homeless Plan*, 2003.

Note: From 1998 through 2001, all beds, whether they were available year-round or only in winter, were counted in the Current Inventory. Beginning in 2002, only year-round beds were counted in the Current Inventory.

Data Development

More data is needed to understand the issues faced by children and families who are homeless or have insecure living conditions, and the types of services that offer support. Please refer to the Data Development Agenda section of this report for more information.