
Portland, Oregon
Vulnerability Index Fact Sheet
Common Ground Institute for Portland's Bureau of Housing and Community Development
October 24, 2008

In January 2005, the City of Portland and Multnomah County launched a 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness. This plan emphasized immediate placement into permanent housing, along with essential support services and rent assistance, for chronically homeless people. Since the roll-out of the 10-Year Plan, 1,408 chronically homeless adults have moved into permanent housing. However, we know we have many more people living on our streets who need our help. To better inform local planning and system coordination efforts, Portland's Bureau of Housing and Community Development has partnered with Common Ground Institute to implement Common Ground's Vulnerability Index.

The Vulnerability Index is a tool for identifying and prioritizing the street homeless population for housing according to the fragility of their health. It is a practical application of research into the causes of death of homeless individuals conducted by Boston's Healthcare for the Homeless organization, led by Dr. Jim O'Connell. The Boston research identified the specific health conditions that cause homeless individuals to be most at risk for dying on the street. The Vulnerability Index is administered in a form of a survey, which captures a homeless individual's health and social status. It identifies the most vulnerable through a ranking system which takes into account risk factors and the duration of homelessness. This ranking allows those with the most severe health risks to be identified and prioritized for housing and other support.

From the early successes of its Street to Home program, Common Ground has consistently observed that putting names and faces – and now medical conditions – to formerly anonymous street homeless individuals inspires action. The commitment of housing resources and the expedited housing placement of the medically-fragile, have been the direct, concrete results of the use of the Vulnerability Index. The Vulnerability Index has been used in New York City, Los Angeles County's infamous Skid Row, Santa Monica, New Orleans, and Washington, DC, as a powerful force for change.

By surveying people who are living on our streets here in Portland using the Vulnerability Index, the Bureau of Housing and Community Development now has health and housing data on the individuals living on the streets and in some of our community's shelters. This data will allow Portland to take immediate action on behalf of the most vulnerable people who are living on our streets, as well as identifying and implementing system improvements.

Vulnerability Index - Process

This week, Common Ground staff worked in collaboration the City of Portland's Bureau of Housing and Community Development, and almost 70 volunteers from 25 different organizations to create a by-name list of all those sleeping on the streets and in shelters in selected high concentration areas of Portland. In addition to systematically gathering the names, pictures, and dates of birth of individuals sleeping on the street, the teams also captured data on their health status, institutional history (jail, prison, foster care, hospital, and military), length of homelessness, patterns of shelter use, healthcare and income sources. Common Ground then used information from the Vulnerability Index surveys to identify individuals who are the most vulnerable in our community.

On Monday, October 20, 2008, more than 100 people attended information and surveying training sessions led by Common Ground. Starting Tuesday, October 21, for three consecutive days, 13 teams of 3 or more volunteer surveyors methodically canvassed Portland from 6 am to 8 am and attempted to administer a 45 question survey to everyone observed sleeping outside. Each team was led by an

experienced street outreach worker and included a volunteer from our medical community. 646 surveys were administered. 407 pictures were taken as part of the survey. 302 (47%) individuals met at least one high-risk criterion from the Vulnerability Index. Each person who agreed to participate signed a confidentiality/release of information form, which included specific authorizations related to photographs.

Portland Findings:

646 People Surveyed

47% of All Surveyed Are Medically Vulnerable (302 people)

Vulnerability Index: At-Risk Indicators

Indicators	People in Portland, of Surveys
Tri-Morbid*	231
Over 3X Hospital or ER admits in last year	218
Over 3 ER Visits in last 3 months	275
Age Over 60	19
HIV/AIDS	20
Cirrhosis/End Stage Liver Disease	72
End Stage Renal Disease or Dialysis	29
Frostbite/Hypothermia (Exposure Related)	91

* Tri-Morbid definition: Co-occurring psychiatric, substance abuse, and chronic medical condition.

Other Chronic Health Conditions	People in Portland, of Surveys
Heart Conditions	133
Cancer	47
Diabetes	75
Emphysema	57
HEP C	158
Asthma	155
Tuberculosis	38
Serious Head Injury/Brain Disease	To Be Determined

Age

- The average age is 42
- 38 people are vulnerable and over the age of 55
- Age Range:
 - Under 19: 15
 - 20-29: 89
 - 30-39: 126
 - 40-49: 219
 - 50-59: 126
 - Over 60: 19
- 23 people met the mortality risk criteria specific for people under the age of 25

Years Homeless:

- The average years homeless is 5
- The average years homeless for the Vulnerable Cohort is 7.24
- The longest reported length of homelessness for a single individual is 41 years

Gender

- 77% of people are male

Race

- Of the people surveyed, 65% are White, 15% are African American, 8% are American Indian/Alaskan Native, 10% are Hispanic and 1% is Asian

Veterans

- 22% (N=129) of the people are veterans
- 5% of the 129 veterans reported receipt of VA benefits
- 45 veterans are vulnerable

Hospitalizations/Emergency Room Visits

- 217 people reported at least 3 hospitalizations in the last year, out of all surveyed
- 274 people reported at least 3 ER visits within the past 3 months, out of all surveyed
- A total of 730 ER visits in the past 3 months were reported by respondents at an estimated cost of \$492/visit for an estimated cost of over \$1.43 million per year
- A total of 460 inpatient hospitalizations in the past year were reported by respondents

Income

- 88% of the most vulnerable, had no documented income other than food stamps
- 21% of the most vulnerable, reported panhandling as a source of income

Health Insurance

- 63% (N=408) of people are uninsured
- 199 people in the Vulnerable Cohort are uninsured (66%)

Mental Health/Substance Abuse/Dually Diagnosed

- 229 vulnerable individuals reported or were observed to have mental illness only
- 279 vulnerable individuals reported or were observed to have a history of substance abuse only
- 217 vulnerable individuals reported or were observed to be dually diagnosed

History of Jail/Prison

- 80% of people reported having been to jail
- 30% of people reported having been to prison.

Foster Care History

- 182 individuals reported having been in foster care
- 58% (N=100) are vulnerable

Victim of Violent Attack:

- 45% of the people reported being a victim of violent attack since becoming homeless

HIV/AIDS

- 3% (20) of individuals report HIV/AIDS.

For more information on Portland's Vulnerability Index Data

Contact: Liora Berry, 503-823-2391 or lberry@ci.portland.or.us

Coordinator, Ending Homelessness Initiative

Bureau of Housing and Community Development

City of Portland

Common Ground Institute

Founded in 1990, Common Ground's mission is to end homelessness through innovative programs that transform people, buildings, and entire communities. Common Ground pioneered the concept of supportive housing – affordable housing with on-site social services – as a solution to homelessness, and today we are one of the largest developers of supportive housing in the United States. As program innovators, we address the needs of individuals and families who are most at risk of becoming homeless, as well as those who are chronically homeless. We bring together service providers, government agencies, landlords, businesses, and members of the community to support homelessness prevention and housing initiatives.

In 2007, Common Ground launched its Common Ground Institute (CGI), a national technical assistance initiative designed to bring innovative methodologies and hands-on field support to communities seeking solutions to homelessness. The Institute's overarching goal is to end homelessness by collaborating with government leaders, local organizations, and private developers in strategically situated communities. In each city, CGI pursues four objectives in support of this goal: create housing, build knowledge, test and model innovative solutions, and promote effective practices.

Contact Information:

Becky Kanis
Director of Innovations
917.957.7104
bkanis@commonground.org

Beth Sandor
Los Angeles Field Director
310.699.2028
bsandor@commonground.org

Lori Girvan
Director, Common Ground Institute
646.413.3875
lgirvan@commonground.org