



Posted on Tue, Jun. 14, 2011

## HUD: Rural Americans increasingly turn to shelters

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Associated Press

As the recession gripped America, thousands more people in rural and suburban areas turned to homeless shelters for help.

The number of people using shelters or transitional housing in suburban and rural areas increased 57 percent from 2007 to 2010, with more than 500,000 people from smaller communities seeking help in 2010, according to a report by the Housing and Urban Development Department. During the same time there was a decrease in the use of shelters in urban areas.

HUD Secretary Shaun Donovan said Tuesday in a conference call with reporters that about 40 percent of those who served in the armed forces come from rural areas and homelessness among Iraq and Afghanistan veterans could be a contributing factor. He said the agency is stepping up efforts to combat homelessness near some military bases, and that legislation signed in 2009 by President Barack Obama contained a component that opens the door for more programs targeting homelessness in rural areas.

Families represent a much larger share of the total sheltered population than ever before, the report said. A majority of the homeless families consist of a single mother with young children.

"It's not surprising, given the economic crisis, that we would see an increasing number of families," Donovan said. "I think it is a direct result of the employment, the economic challenges we've seen."

The report said research has shown that families are more likely to become homeless for economic reasons while individuals are more likely to become homeless because of substance abuse and mental illness.

There was a bright spot in the report. The total number of people chronically homeless during the four-year period decreased 11 percent. Donovan said the emphasis on programs to assist the chronically homeless and increase in permanent supportive housing nationwide helps explain why.

And, the number of homeless individuals overall in the United States held steady between 2009 and 2010, the report said.

The worse recession since the Great Depression of the 1930s began in December 2007 and ended in 2009, although unemployment remains at painfully high levels.

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