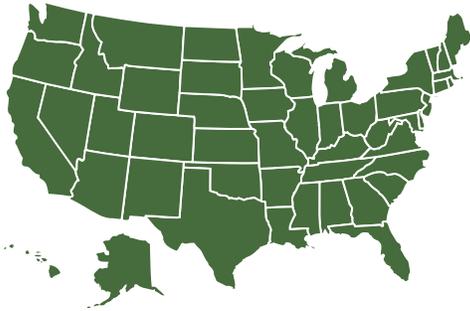


## Issue Brief

## HOUSING IN THE UNITED STATES



In 2009, the housing costs for approximately 38.4% of housing units in the United States - representing 42.9 million households - exceeded 30% of household income. Approximately 1.6 million Americans had used a homeless shelter or transitional housing within the preceding 12 months.

### WHAT IS SOCIETAL DISTRESS?

Societal distress describes living conditions that do not satisfy basic human needs, such as food, shelter, health, income, and education.

Visit [www.humanneeds.vcu.edu](http://www.humanneeds.vcu.edu) for more details.

### What is precarious housing and homelessness?

**Precarious housing** refers to housing conditions that are unaffordable, overcrowded, or physically inadequate (e.g., no hot water). **Homelessness** refers to the state of living in emergency shelters, transitional housing, or places not meant for habitation (e.g., the streets, abandoned buildings). Expanded definitions, not used here, include people who are “doubled-up” with family or friends or living in hotels, motels, or other unstable conditions.

### How many Americans are affected?

In 2009—the most recent year for which complete data are available:

- Housing cost burdens, a major stressor and risk factor for homelessness, were severe (at least 50% of income) for 20.8 million (18.6%) housing units.
- The prevalence of severe housing cost burdens increased steadily from 12.0% to 18.6% between 1999 and 2009.
- Overcrowding (more than one occupant per room) existed in 2.5 million (2.2%) housing units.
- Owners/renters were uncomfortably cold for more than 24 hours in 9.7 million (9.1%) units.
- On a single night in January 2009, approximately 643,000 persons were homeless, including approximately 240,000 persons on the streets (unsheltered homeless).

In September 2009, how many people living in the United States had lived in a homeless residential facility in the previous 12 months?



**THE PROJECT ON SOCIETAL DISTRESS** is an initiative of the Virginia Commonwealth University Center on Human Needs, which examines the prevalence of societal distress in five domains—food security, housing, health, education, and income—and makes the information available to the public and policymakers. This research effort focuses on presenting accurate data on the number of Americans affected by these conditions and not examining the causes or proposing solutions. The Project on Societal Distress is funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.

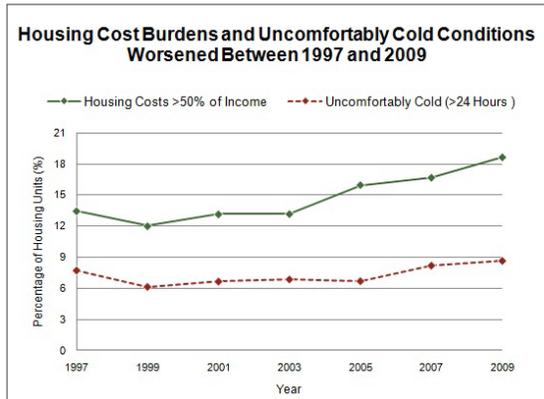
Severe housing cost burdens increased by 55.1% between 1999 and 2009 (6.6% in absolute terms).

## WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Precarious housing conditions and homelessness pose a threat to physical, mental, and emotional health; to personal safety; to the stability of home life; to childhood development and learning; and to the employment and productivity of the family.

## What are the trends?

From 1997 to 2009, the prevalence of some precarious housing conditions remained stable or decreased, but housing cost burdens and uncomfortably cold conditions became more common in recent years.



## Who is affected?

**Children:** In 2009, children represented 22.1% of those who used emergency shelters or transitional housing within the preceding 12 months.

**Seniors:** In 2009, severe housing costs affected one out of five (21.8%) seniors who owned or rented housing. Approximately 5-6% of senior householders reported uncomfortably cold conditions for more than 24 hours, unsafe drinking water, or signs of rodents.

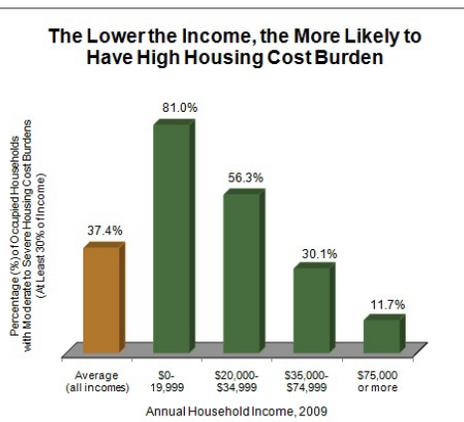
**Minorities:** In 2009, more than one out of four black (26.9%) and Hispanic (27.3%) householders reported severe housing cost burdens, and 10.2% of Hispanic householders reported overcrowding. Blacks and Hispanics represented 38.7% and 19.5%, respectively, of those who used emergency shelters or transitional housing within the preceding 12 months.

**The Poor:** In 2009, housing cost burdens were moderate to severe (30% or more of income) for 81.0% of households that earned less than \$20,000 per year.

**Households with Less Education:** In 2009, three out of four housing units with severe physical problems were owned or rented by people with less than a bachelor's degree.

## SOURCES AND METHODS

The statistics reported here were obtained from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's *2009 Annual Homelessness Assessment Report to Congress* and the *American Housing Survey for the United States, 2009*. The data underwent statistical analysis by the research staff of the Virginia Commonwealth University Center on Human Needs. Analytic methods are detailed at [www.humanneeds.vcu.edu](http://www.humanneeds.vcu.edu).



**THE VIRGINIA COMMONWEALTH UNIVERSITY CENTER ON HUMAN NEEDS** ([www.humanneeds.vcu.edu](http://www.humanneeds.vcu.edu)) was chartered in 2007 to provide the public and policymakers with information about the prevalence of societal distress in the United States. Its mission is to document how many Americans confront food insecurity, precarious housing or homelessness, inadequate health and health care, inferior education, and inadequate income/poverty.

For more details visit [www.humanneeds.vcu.edu](http://www.humanneeds.vcu.edu).