

## Co-Occurrence of Substance Abuse and Homelessness

*Individuals struggling with substance abuse often face a complex array of issues, including homelessness. Homelessness can interfere with accessing and completing treatment and successful treatment outcomes. Substance abuse contributes to involvement with the criminal justice system, domestic violence, the complex problems faced by persons with mental illness, and other issues. The impact of substance abuse also reaches beyond the substance abuser to children and family members.*

### RECOMMENDATIONS

In August 2005, UCS surveyed Johnson County’s homeless services and substance abuse treatment providers as a first step in quantifying the co-occurrence of substance abuse and homelessness. A small study group from the Continuum of Care on Homelessness and Drug & Alcoholism Council (both UCS programs) and other stakeholders then met over several months’ time to develop recommendations.\*

Key recommendations reflect the survey data, as well as knowledge of current services and feedback on today’s changing client profile. In summary, these recommendations are:

- Expand appropriate housing options to respond to persons with co-occurring substance abuse and homelessness. Suggestions include re-instituting half-way houses that offer appropriate case management, identifying housing models that match the typical client profile, and/or supportive housing programs that include shelter and supportive services.
- Enhance the effectiveness of current substance abuse treatment and homeless services systems through increased collaboration and cooperation among providers. An improved assessment and referral protocol, cross-systems training and communication, and pursuit of collaborative funding opportunities are means of improving outcomes for both systems.
- Create a more seamless continuum for this difficult-to-serve client population by:
  - Offering pre-treatment and case management upon entry into either the substance abuse treatment or homeless services system of care, that addresses mental health needs, transportation and client motivation issues.
  - Enhancing after-care and case management opportunities to improve long-term outcomes.
  - Expanding treatment capacity, including targeting current resources to improved system continuity.
- Improve community education on substance abuse as a chronic disease, including reconnecting clients with families/community, case management that facilitates development of on-going supports, and policies that facilitate access to basic needs, including housing and health care.

Total Homeless Clients Surveyed, By Gender and Self-Reported Current Substance Abuse					
Clients by Gender	Homeless w/ Co-Occurring Substance Abuse		Homeless, No Current Substance Abuse		Total Clients
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	
Male	74	62%	22	31%	96
Female	45	38%	49	69%	94
<b>Total</b>	<b>119</b>		<b>71</b>		<b>190</b>

\* From August 1-12, 2005, Johnson County’s homeless services providers surveyed homeless clients receiving services, including those who did not indicate current substance abuse. Substance abuse treatment providers only surveyed clients who were identified as homeless. The survey used a broad definition of homelessness. Survey results were shared with Continuum members, the DAC, and current Alcohol Tax Fund grantees that provided feedback on the survey data. The entire survey analysis is available by contacting UCS.

## KEY FACTS

### Significant co-morbidity of substance abuse and homelessness exists in Johnson County.

- The overwhelming majority of homeless clients—119 of 190 (63%) surveyed—reported current abuse of alcohol or other substances.
- More homeless males (74 of 96 surveyed, 77%) reported current substance abuse; of the 94 females surveyed, under half (45 of 94 surveyed, 48%) reported current substance abuse.
- Of those homeless clients reporting current substance abuse, more than half (55%) also indicated having been homeless at least once during the past three years.
- Among all homeless clients—those reporting current substance abuse and those reporting no current abuse—more than half indicated that a spouse, partner or parent abused substances.

### Substance abuse correlates with negative outcomes for children and families.

- The large majority of homeless clients reporting current substance abuse (82%) do not have children. Twenty-two homeless clients with current substance abuse do have children.
- One of three parents with substance abuse issues reported having a child/ren in the child welfare or juvenile justice system.
- Nearly three of four (73%) homeless parents currently abusing substances reported having had a spouse, partner or parent who abused substances.
- Nearly half (45%) of homeless parents reporting current substance abuse no longer live with their children; in contrast, only 6% of non-substance abusing parents no longer live with their children.
- Nearly half of all homeless substance abusers reported that substance abuse contributed to loss of housing or a job.

Household Type	Homeless w/ Co-Occurring Substance Abuse		Homeless - No Current Substance Abuse	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Clients (no children)	97	82%	36	51%
Clients w/ children	22	18%	35	49%
<b>Special Circumstances for Households w/ Children</b>				
Clients who do not live w/ children	10	45%	2	6%
Clients w/ children in CINC* or JO** system	7	32%	3	9%
Clients with children and a current status as a victim of domestic violence	6	27%	18	51%
Clients w/ children who reported ever having a spouse or partner or parent who abused substances	16	73%	16	46%
Parents under age 30	8	36%	16	46%

\* Child-in-Need-of-Care

\*\* Juvenile Offender

**Most homeless clients reporting current substance abuse have accessed treatment previously.**

- Of the 119 homeless clients reporting current substance abuse, two of three (67%) had sought substance abuse treatment at least once, some as many as seven times.
- Homeless clients age 30 to 40 are most likely to have sought treatment (82%); those under age 30 least likely to have sought treatment (54%).
- Of the 119 homeless clients reporting current substance abuse, more than three of four (77%) reported use of substances other than alcohol. Nearly half—47%—of the 119 reported both current alcohol and other substance use.

<b>Age of Homeless Clients w/ Co-Occurring Substance Abuse</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent Reporting Past Treatment Episode</b>
Under Age 30	35	54%
Age 30-35	22	82%
Age 36-40	17	82%
Age 41-45	22	59%
Age 46-59	19	68%
Age 60 and Older	3	66%

<b>Number of Treatment Episodes Reported in Past Three Years</b>	
One	28
Two	21
Three	9
Four to seven	4
Unknown, or not in past three years	18

**Substance abuse creates cross-system challenges for the client and family members due to criminal justice, domestic violence, homelessness, and mental health involvement.**

- For the 58 court-involved homeless clients reporting current substance abuse, the vast majority (86%) had recent criminal justice system involvement through incarceration or community supervision.
- One of six clients reporting current substance abuse (16%) were also victims of domestic violence, creating challenges for the domestic violence response system.
- Persons with serious and persistent mental illness (SPMI) frequently have a dual diagnosis as substance abusers. Of the 43 clients with SPMI, three of four (76%) had dual diagnoses (SPMI and substance abuse). Among the 32 clients reporting this dual diagnosis, 72% reported having been homeless at least once in the past three years.

**CONTACT INFORMATION**

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**United Community Services of Johnson County**

12351 West 96<sup>th</sup> Terrace, Suite 200, Lenexa, KS 66215

913/438-4764

Website: [www.ucsjoco.org](http://www.ucsjoco.org)