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Federal, State Reports Shed Light On Ohio Homelessness

A federal point-in-time count found Ohio's homeless rate increased slightly in 2018, while a state report found an increase in the number of people accessing homelessness services in 2017.

The **Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress** by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development found 10,249 homeless Ohioans, up 1.5% compared to the year before.

The data comes from a point-in-time estimate of the number of homeless people on one night in January. Although the county-by-county census doesn't account for the total population moving in and out of homelessness over a given year, it does provide policymakers and advocates a general sense of year-to-year trends based on a single 24-hour period.

Nationally, the number of homeless people identified during the count dropped by 0.3% over the year, according to the report.

Nine in every 10,000 people were experiencing homelessness, according to the HUD report. The count includes 6,929 individuals, 3,320 people in families with children, 686 unaccompanied youth, 749 veterans and 700 chronically homeless individuals.

While the count was up 1.5% from 2017, it was down 18.5% compared to 2010.

"Our state and local partners are increasingly focused on finding lasting solutions to homelessness even as they struggle against the headwinds of rising rents," HUD Secretary Ben Carson said in a statement. "Much progress is being made and much work remains to be done but I have great hope that communities all across our nation are intent on preventing and ending homelessness."

The state **report**, released Wednesday by the Ohio Housing Finance Agency, provided an update to data released earlier in the year. The agency looked at how many Ohioans accessed homelessness services during the year, finding 70,123 in 2017, up from 68,491 the previous year.

That total is up 20% from 2012. The OHFA report found the average age of a person being served for the first time in 2017 was 31, up from 28 for 2012-2016. The very old and the very young were the

fastest growing segments of the homeless population.

During 2017, 29.7% of those accessing services were children, while 17.7% were aged 50 or over.

"Maintaining safe and affordable housing is particularly challenging for lower and middle income Ohioans, who face high housing costs," the report said. "About a quarter of all renting households – 390,000 households – experience severe housing cost burden, meaning they spend at least half their income on utilities and rent. Those who have high housing costs relative to their income are more susceptible to periods of housing instability, as unexpected costs, such as a car repair or medical bill, may force them to decide between staying in their home and other needs."

Bill Faith, executive director of the Coalition on Homelessness and Housing in Ohio, pointed to the state's supply of affordable housing.

"Given the growing gap between rents and incomes, it's remarkable that homelessness hasn't risen more dramatically," he said in a statement. "Communities have managed to minimize the increase by adopting more effective methods to prevent homelessness for at-risk families and quickly restore housing when people lose their homes."

Homeless agencies could be overwhelmed if rent continues to rise more than wages, he said.

"Homelessness isn't inevitable," he said. "We know what the solution is: affordable housing. Ohio can take concrete steps to reverse the alarming increase in the number of children and seniors entering the homeless system."

He urged the incoming DeWine administration and the General Assembly to put more money into the Ohio Housing Trust Fund and using some of the state's surplus federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families funding for programs like rapid rehousing.

"We commend the focus on improving early childhood education. But we know It's very difficult for kids who are homeless, living in a car or a shelter, to do well in school without access to stable housing," he said. "The good news is strategies that reduce homelessness also position Ohio to make progress on education and other public policy issues, like health care, child welfare and the economy."