

Basic Needs – Food, Clothing, Rent & Utilities



The Basic Needs Coalition of Central Texas (BNC):

The BNC (www.basicneeds-ctx.org) is a grass-roots collaboration of 19 human service providers who seek to address core challenges for families as they move toward self-sufficiency. The BNC produced this document of frequently asked questions (FAQ) on behalf of the Community Action Network. All data included is the most current available.

Basic Needs Defined:

Basic needs are defined as food, clothing and housing (rent, mortgage, utility) assistance. While there is a wide range of other services essential for an individual to reach self-sufficiency, the Coalition focuses on providing assistance in these basic needs areas to meet immediate crisis situations and prevent homelessness.

Highlights:

Demand for Services Continues to Rise:

- In FY 2004, Caritas of Austin provided 1,350 clients with rent or utility assistance, while turning away 17,364 requests due to lack of funding. Caritas also served 93,763 hot meals from its soup kitchen in 2004 — an increase of more than 5,500 from the previous year (www.caritasofaustin.org).
- 2-1-1 Texas (a service of United Way Capital Area) experienced a 20% increase in callers requesting basic needs assistance in the Austin area from 2003 to 2004 (www.unitedwaycapitalarea.org).
- In 2004, the Capital Area Food Bank distributed more than 15 million pounds of food. (www.austinfoodbank.org).
- The Travis County Health & Human Services Department provided more than \$750,000 in utility assistance and more than \$600,000 in rent assistance during FY 2004, yet was still unable to meet total demand (www.co.travis.tx.us).
- Between FY2003 and FY2004, the City of Austin Health and Human Services Department experienced a 60% increase in the distribution of food and clothing, totaling 122,822 units in FY2004 (www.ci.austin.tx.us).

The Impact of the Economy on Basic Needs Services:

Job loss creates a domino effect for individuals and families who are marginally self-sufficient. Many people are forced to choose between necessities such as buying food instead of paying for other expenses such as rent, utilities or medical bills. Costs to the community increase dramatically when families lose their housing: the cost of being homeless is as much as \$4,300 per month for a family of three (including transitional housing costs and other potential expenses). The cost of maintaining a family in current housing is approximately \$1,500 per month (Basic Needs Service Delivery System Interim Report, 2002).

Top Community Needs:
- Utility Bill Assistance
- Rent Assistance
- Food Pantry

(2-1-1 Texas, July 1, 2003, through June 30, 2004)

Facts And Questions about Basic Needs

How much does it cost to live in Austin/Travis County?

- A single parent with one child needs to earn a minimum of \$17/hour (\$33,819/year) to support his/her family in the Austin – San Marcos Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) (Center for Public Policy Priorities www.cppp.org).
- The most recent fair market rent ranges from \$567 for an efficiency to \$914 for a two-bedroom apartment (Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), 2004).
- Forty-one percent of Travis County households (127,984) spent more than 30% (the limit for housing affordability according to HUD) of their annual income on housing costs during 2003 (U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2003).

Is Demand for Basic Needs Services Growing?

Between Fiscal Years 2003 and 2004, 2-1-1 Texas experienced:

- An 18% increase in the number of people requesting help with paying utility bills.
- A 24% increase in calls for rent assistance.

In FY 2002, Travis County had just 38,632 participants in the Food Stamp Program

(www.dhs.state.tx.us). The Center for Public Policy Priorities

(www.cppp.org) estimates that there are 87,270 people in Travis County who could be receiving food stamps, but currently are not. If all of these people were enrolled, they would draw down more than \$89 million in Federal Food Stamp assistance.

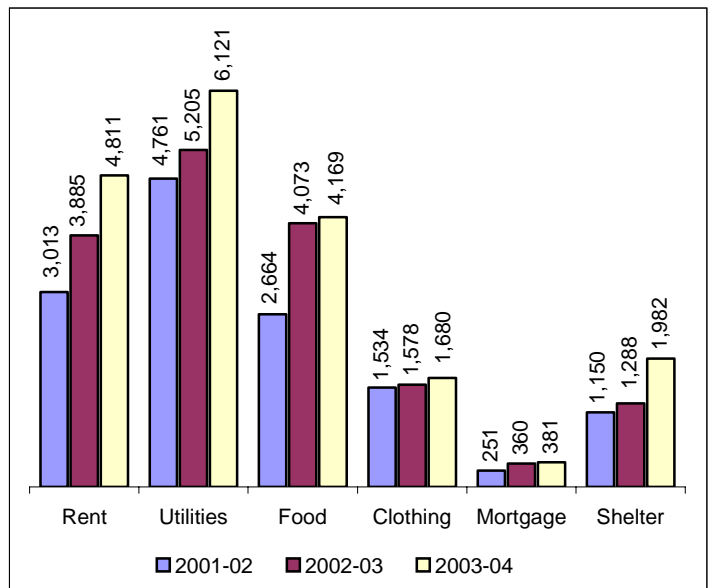
The Housing Authority of the City of Austin (HACA) reported that it operates 1,928 units of public housing at approximately 98% occupancy and has more than 4,000 people on the waiting list. HACA also has more than 5,000 housing choice vouchers/Section 8 participants and has more than 3,500 people on the waiting list, which is currently closed (Housing Authority of the City of Austin, January 2005).

Who Needs Basic Needs Services in the Austin/Travis County Area?

With 16.3% of the state's population living in poverty, Texas is ranked as having the 8th highest poverty rate in the nation. Nationally, the percentage of individuals living in poverty during 2003 was 12.7%.

In 2003, an estimated 14% of the Travis County population, or 116,231 residents, were living in poverty, which reflects a 2.8% increase from 2000 and 2001 (U.S. Census).

Calls for Help by Type (2-1-1 Texas)



Demographics of Food Pantry Clients in Travis County

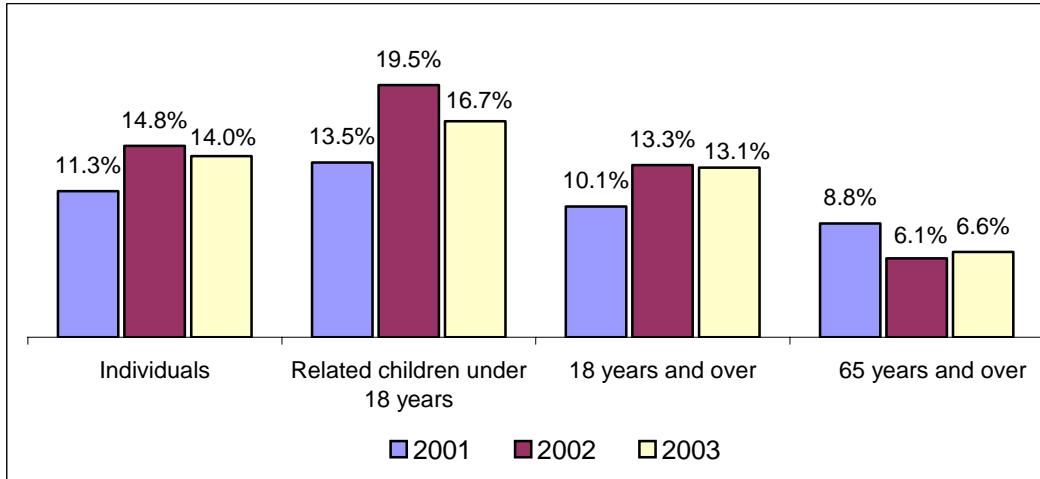
- 81% Female
- Average number of dependents: 3
- 67% live at or below the poverty level (\$15,260 for a family of 3)
- 21% work full or part-time
- 30% are disabled or retired
(*Capital Area Food Bank*)

Facts And Questions about Basic Needs

People Living in Poverty in Travis County:

The chart below compares the percentage of Travis County residents by age group living in poverty, showing an overall increase since 2000 (a total of 116,231 in 2003).

Percentage of People Living in Poverty in Travis County



Source: U.S. Census

Austin-San Marcos MSA—Family Security Index

The table below demonstrates that a family must make at least 223% of the federal poverty income guidelines to afford to live in the Austin – San Marcos MSA. Each of the expense estimates below are conservative, and present an accurate picture of the cost of living in Austin.

	One Adult No Children	Single Parent One Child	Single Parent Two Children	Two Parents Two Children
Typical Monthly Expenses				
Housing	\$533	\$858	\$858	\$858
Food	\$147	\$206	\$295	\$418
Child Care		\$366	\$569	\$569
Medical	\$281	\$460	\$460	\$727
Transportation	\$278	\$278	\$278	\$391
Other Necessities	\$177	\$294	\$294	\$321
Tax Payments & Credits	\$247	\$356	\$306	\$386
Total Income Needed to Survive in Austin				
Annual	\$19,953	\$33,819	\$36,729	\$44,044
Hourly	\$10	\$17	\$18	\$22
% of Federal Poverty Level	223%	285%	265%	252%

Making It: What it Really Takes to Live in Texas. Center for Public Policy Priorities, November 8, 2001. Estimates for all categories tend to underestimate actual monthly expenses.

Facts And Questions about Basic Needs

Q: How often can people access basic needs services, and what is the average amount of assistance?

- According to the eligibility guidelines of two major basic needs service providers in Travis County (Caritas and the Travis County Health & Human Services Department), clients are only eligible for services once every 12 months. The average amount of rent and/or utility assistance provided is approximately \$150 to \$200 per family.
- People who qualify for services from Travis County are generally in extreme poverty –with an income of 50% of Federal Poverty Income Guidelines (an annual income of \$9,425 for a family of four). Exceptions are made for older adults and persons with disabilities. Caritas serves individuals/families with incomes up to 100% of poverty (\$18,850 for a family of four).

Q: What is being done to address the unmet need?

- The Basic Needs Coalition of Central Texas developed the Best Single Source (BSS) project, an innovative, collaborative model for providing basic needs services in Austin/Travis County. The BSS simplifies access to services, promotes self-sufficiency, and links participant agencies electronically to share outcomes and avoid duplication. The BSS project has received funding from Advanced Micro Devices (AMD), the City of Austin Health and Human Services Department, the Travis County Health and Human Services Department and an anonymous United Way donor.

Q: What can I do to help?

Volunteer:

- Contact the United Way Capital Area's Volunteer Center at 211 or visit www.volunteeraustin.org for volunteer opportunities.
- See the Basic Needs Coalition's website (www.basicneeds-ctx.org) for volunteer opportunities.

Join the Basic Needs Coalition of Central Texas:

- Contact Dan Pruett at dpruett@mealsonwheelsandmore.org or visit www.basicneeds-ctx.org.

Donate:

- Through your City of Austin utility bill, pay a small monthly donation to the Customer Assistance Program (CAP) to help individuals who cannot afford to pay their utility bills.
- Donate directly to local helping agencies – money, time or goods. See www.basicneeds-ctx.org for more information.

Additional Information:

- To access this document or additional, current information regarding basic needs or other issue areas, go to www.caction.org. Hard copies are available at the Community Action Network offices, 1111 West 6th St. Suite B220, 78703, Phone number, 512-414-8203
- For information on available basic needs services call 2-1-1 Texas, a service of United Way Capital Area. Also refer to the United Way Capital Area's online database at www.unitedwaycapitalarea.org.



CAN Partners: Austin Area Human Services Association ~ Austin Area Interreligious Ministries ~ Austin Area Research Organization
Austin Independent School District ~ Austin Travis County MHMR Center ~ Capital Metro ~ City of Austin ~ Community Justice Council
Greater Austin Chamber ~ Health Partnership 2010 ~ Higher Education Coalition ~ Travis County ~ United Way Capital Area ~ WorkSource