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Forum paints a picture of the homeless population in Minnesota

A slew of statistics and suggestions about fighting homelessness were part of the summit of local leaders.

By [Terry Collins](#), Star Tribune

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While some progress is being made to eliminate homelessness, more work needs to be done across Minnesota, a panel of experts told civic leaders Wednesday.

"It's simply a plain moral wrong. ... Ending homelessness is a dream today, but it can be a reality tomorrow," said Tim Marx, commissioner of the Minnesota Housing Finance Agency, one of the panelists. "We don't need any more words, we need action."

More than 300 people attended a luncheon on the topic "Ending Homelessness," at the Minneapolis Convention Center. It was sponsored by the Minneapolis Foundation.

The event was held at the same site where more than 800 homeless people participated last month in Project Homeless Connect, where they were able to get services ranging from job tips to health care and a haircut.

There are about 3,000 homeless people in Hennepin County and more than 9,200 in Minnesota, a third of them children, according to a study by the Wilder Research Group.

On Wednesday, attendees also learned that:

- More than half of the homeless people said they'd been homeless more than once in the past three years.
- About 28 percent of homeless adults have a job.
- Nearly 40 percent of homeless people said they lost their housing because they couldn't afford rent. Mental health issues, chemical dependency, lack of education and incarceration were also cited as reasons for homelessness.
- One-third of homeless military veterans in Minnesota have served in combat; about 625 veterans are homeless on any given night, slightly down from around 700 in 2003.
- Nearly half of all homeless people in the Twin Cities are black and nearly one in five in outstate Minnesota is American Indian.

It's not just an urban issue, said Gabrielle Strong, tribal administrator for the Lower Sioux

Indian Community, adding that it's a struggle to see Native Americans battling homelessness "on their own indigenous homeland."

Richard Amos, housing services director at St. Stephen's Human Services in Minneapolis, urged more outreach and transitional housing because the homeless can't always afford to plan ahead when "they are living for today."

During a question-and-answer period with the audience that became more suggestion-oriented, Joshua Lang, director of human rights at St. Stephen's, said he believes that a form of institutional racism exists because the United States has enough resources to give everyone some form of housing.

Sandy Vargas, president of the Minneapolis Foundation, said that the organization has created a fund to end homelessness. Donations can be made online at www.minnesota.meeting.com.

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