ASPE RESEARCH BRIEF

OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY FOR PLANNING AND EVALUATION

OFFICE OF HUMAN SERVICES POLICY - U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

HEAD START CHILDREN AND FAMILIES EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS: TRENDS, CHARACTERISTICS, AND PROGRAM SERVICES

Executive Summary

Head Start programs provide 3- and 4-year-old children with early learning experiences to prepare them for kindergarten, as well as comprehensive services to promote children's positive development and to support family stability. In addition to physical and mental health services, parenting programs, and other supports, Head Start programs provide specific services to meet the needs of families experiencing homelessness. The 2007 reauthorization of Head Start recognized the unique needs of children experiencing homelessness by formally prioritizing them for enrollment and making them categorically eligible to receive Head Start services.

This brief provides a descriptive picture of Head Start children and families who experience homelessness and the kinds of services Head Start programs offer them. In this brief, "homeless" includes those who are literally homeless (living on streets, in cars, in shelters, or in other places not meant for habitation), as well as those who are "doubled-up" (multiple families share a unit intended for a single family due to economic hardship, loss of housing, or a similar reason). Data sources include the Head Start Program Information Report (PIR) and the 2009 cohort of the Head Start Family and Child Experiences Survey (FACES 2009).[1]

Key Findings

Enrollment Trends for Children Experiencing Homelessness in Head Start[2]

- The number of children in Head Start experiencing homelessness at some point during the program year has nearly doubled over time, from 20,647 (2.2 percent of all Head Start children) in 2006-2007 to 35,270 (4.2 percent) in 2015-2016.
- The percent of children *initially deemed eligible* for enrollment in Head Start because they were experiencing homelessness at the time of enrollment has more than doubled in recent years, from 1.6 percent in 2008-2009 to 3.6 percent in 2015-2016.

Characteristics of Head Start Children and Families Experiencing Homelessness[3]

- The majority (95 percent) of Head Start children experiencing homelessness were doubled-up; the remaining five percent were literally homeless.
- Compared with stably housed Head Start children, those who experienced homelessness were:

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1. Analyses with the PIR represent the universe of Head Start grantees serving 3- and 4-year-old children. Analyses with FACES 2009 data were conducted with a representative sample of newly enrolled 3- and 4-year-old Head Start children from the 2009-2010 program year. The FACES 2009 data exclude grantees located in U.S. territories, while the PIR data include grantees from these locations. FACES data also do not include American Indian/Alaska Native and Migrant Seasonal Head Start programs and thus these grantees were also excluded from analyses using PIR data. See Appendix A for additional details on the methodology and data sources for this brief.
2. All findings in this section are based on analyses with PIR data.
3. All findings in this section are based on analyses with FACES 2009 data.

- *More* likely to be Hispanic/Latino (and *less* likely to be African American);
- *More* likely to have immigrant parents and live in a home where a language other than English was the primary language spoken;
- *More* likely to be from single-parent households and to have mothers who had not completed high school;
- *More* likely to have moved multiple times (two or more) in the last year; and
- Just as likely to have an unemployed mother.

Services Offered by Head Start to Children and Families Experiencing Homelessness[4]

- Head Start programs engaged in a variety of activities to encourage children and families experiencing homelessness to enroll in Head Start, including:
  - contacting agencies serving homeless families,
  - posting information in shelters,
  - sending staff to recruit in shelters, and
  - collaborating with homeless education liaisons.
- Two-thirds of programs also reported doing some "other" activity to encourage enrollment of these families, an area that needs further research.
- The majority of programs offered some kind of housing assistance to families, including:
  - help finding temporary or long-term shelter,
  - transportation to Head Start,
  - additional meetings between parents and staff,
  - accompanying or transporting families to services,
  - scheduling appointments with service providers, and
  - providing financial assistance.
- More than half of programs also reported providing some "other" services to assist these families.
- An off-site community partner most often provided housing assistance or other targeted services for families experiencing homelessness. A few programs provided services directly to children and families or on-site by a community partner.

Implications for Practice and Policy

Since 2007, when children experiencing homelessness were first prioritized for enrollment, Head Start has seen promising increases in enrollment of these children. Although it is not possible to conclude that the change in law directly led to these increases, Head Start programs appear to be making additional efforts to enroll these children. However, it is unclear whether programs are more accurately identifying and enrolling these at-risk children, or whether these trends represent an increase in children and families experiencing homelessness overall (or a combination of the two).

Information about the characteristics of Head Start children and families experiencing homelessness may be useful in targeting outreach efforts and could suggest ways that Head Start programs can better identify families at risk for or currently experiencing homelessness, in order to facilitate families' participation in Head Start and potentially reduce the negative impacts of homelessness on their children's development. For example, Head Start programs could ensure that outreach efforts to identify families experiencing homelessness and connect them with services are conducted in a linguistically and culturally responsive manner. Programs could also check in with families that have moved multiple times to see if they are in need of additional supports during this time of instability.

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[4] All findings in this section are based on analyses with FACES 2009 data.

HEAD START CHILDREN AND FAMILIES EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS: TRENDS, CHARACTERISTICS, AND PROGRAM SERVICES

Purpose of this Brief

This brief provides a descriptive picture of Head Start children and families who experience homelessness. It also illustrates the kinds of services Head Start programs offer these vulnerable children and families.

Head Start programs provide 3- and 4-year-old children from low-income families with early learning experiences to prepare them for kindergarten. Programs also provide comprehensive services to support family stability and promote children's development across a variety of domains. In addition to physical and mental health services, parenting programs, and other supports, Head Start programs provide specific services to meet the needs of children and families experiencing homelessness, a particularly vulnerable group.

Families experiencing homelessness are disproportionately families with young children under the age of 6.[5] Though it is difficult to separate the effects of homelessness from the effects of poverty, homelessness itself can be traumatizing, especially for young children. Children in families experiencing homelessness have high rates of acute and chronic health problems, and the majority have been exposed to violence.[6] If unaddressed, childhood trauma and adverse childhood experiences can have lasting effects on health.[7] In addition, homelessness can have negative effects on children's academic development. Other research shows that the impact of homelessness diminishes with time as families are re-housed.[8] Head Start programs can play an important role in helping families connect to needed housing and other services, while also promoting child development. For instance, programs may help identify (or provide) transportation services

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5   Rog, D. J., Holupka, C. S., & Patton, L. C. (2007).*Characteristics and dynamics of homeless families with children*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Retrieved from https://aspe.hhs.gov/system/files/pdf/75331/report.pdf.

6   Rog, D. J. & Buckner, J. C. (2007). *Homeless families and children.* Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Retrieved from https://aspe.hhs.gov/system/files/pdf/180441/report.pdf.

7   For more information about the Adverse Childhood Experiences Study, see http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/acestudy/.

8   Shinn, M., Schteingart, J. S., Williams, N. C., Carlin-Mathis, J., Bialo-Karagis, N., Becker-Klein, R., & Weitzman, B.C. (2008). Long-term associations of homelessness with children's well-being. *American Behavioral Scientist, 51* (6), 789-810.; Cunningham, M., Harwood, R., & Hall, S. (2010). Residential instability and the McKinney-Vento Homeless Children and Education Program: *What we know, plus gaps in research*. Washington, DC: Urban Institute. Retrieved from http://www.urban.org/research/publication/residential-instability-and-mckinney-vento-homeless-children-and-education-program.pdf; National Center on Family Homelessness, (2011). *The characteristics and needs of families experiencing homelessness.* Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from http://mha.ohio.gov/Portals/0/assets/Initiatives/TIC/Homeless/ The%20Characteristics%20and%20Needs%20of%20Families%20Experiencing%20Homelessness.pdf.; Rog, D. J. & Buckner, J. C. (2007). *Homeless families and children.* Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Retrieved from https://aspe.hhs.gov/system/files/pdf/180441/report.pdf.

to the Head Start center or refer families to community organizations that provide housing assistance.

The 2007 reauthorization of Head Start recognized the unique needs of children experiencing homelessness by formally prioritizing them for enrollment and making them categorically eligible to receive Head Start services.[9] However, little to no research has examined the trends and characteristics of children and families experiencing homelessness in Head Start or the types of assistance Head Start programs provide to these children and families in order to facilitate their participation in Head Start and potentially reduce the negative impacts of homelessness on children's development. This brief helps to fill this gap by examining national trends in the number of Head Start children and families experiencing homelessness; comparing the demographics of these families with stably housed Head Start families; and providing a picture of the housing-related services Head Start programs offer to these families.

Analyses were conducted using data from two sources: (1) the Head Start Program Information Report (PIR) from the program years 2006-2007 through 2015-2016, and (2) the 2009 cohort of the Head Start Family and Child Experiences Survey (FACES 2009). The PIR is information Head Start grantees are required to report annually to the Office of Head Start, primarily for administrative purposes. FACES 2009 is a federally funded descriptive study of a nationally representative sample of 3- and 4-year-old children who entered Head Start for the first time in the fall of 2009 (see Appendix A for additional information on methodology and data sources).

Family Homelessness in the U.S. and Related Head Start Efforts

Child and Family Homelessness Defined

The federal government uses two definitions of "homelessness." First, the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) defines those who are literally homeless as individuals living on the streets, residing in shelters, living in cars, or in other places not meant for habitation. Using this definition, on a single night in 2016, about 61,265 U.S. families with children were experiencing homelessness.[10] This number has declined steadily since 2007, when 78,535 families with children were homeless. Second, the Department of Education uses a broader definition specified in the 2001 McKinney-Vento Act.[11] This includes those captured in HUD's definition as well as children and families living in doubled-up situations, where multiple families share a unit intended for a single family due to economic hardship, loss of housing, or a related reason. Using this more inclusive definition, the Department of Education found that in the 2014-2015 academic year, approximately 39,908 children aged 3-5 experiencing homelessness were enrolled in preschool programs operated by local public schools. This represents a 43.5 percent increase since the 2007-2008 academic year when 27,815 3-5 year olds experiencing homelessness were enrolled.[12] While these numbers do not represent *all* preschool-aged children experiencing homelessness (because not all such children are

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9   The title of the act is *Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007* (the Head Start Act), P.L. 110-134.
10 HUD's definition is defined by the McKinney-Vento Act and was revised by the 2009 Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing (HEARTH) Act. This point-in-time count is reported annually by HUD. Henry, M., Watt, R., Rosenthal, L., & Shivji, A. (2016). *The 2016 Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress: Part 1: Point-in-time estimates of homelessness*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. Retrieved from https://www.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/2016-AHAR-Part-1.pdf
11 42 U.S.C. 11431 et seq.
12 Data retrieved from: http://eddataexpress.ed.gov/. Some of these preschool programs may also receive Head Start funding. Students are considered enrolled if they are attending classes and participating fully in school activities.

enrolled in public preschool), they do provide helpful context for the number of children experiencing homelessness in this type of early care and education (ECE) arrangement.

Head Start and Homelessness

The *Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007* (Public Law 110-134; hereafter referred to as the "Head Start Act") requires that grantees identify and enroll children and families experiencing homelessness (using the broader definition of both literally homeless and doubled-up families), regardless of family income level, making them categorically eligible for Head Start. Therefore, consistent with the Department of Education, Head Start's definition of a child and/or family experiencing homelessness – and the definition used in the current brief – includes both those who are literally homeless and those who are doubled-up.

As required by the Head Start Act, the recently revised Head Start Program Performance Standards (HS PPS)[13] lay out a number of provisions that programs must follow in order to reduce barriers to enrollment and participation for children experiencing homelessness. For instance, programs can choose to reserve up to 3 percent of funded slots for 30 days for children who are homeless or in foster care (after 30 days, such a slot is considered vacant). In addition, programs must allow families experiencing homelessness additional time to obtain documentation required for enrollment, including immunization records. Where possible, programs must also work with community partners to provide transportation for children who are homeless if lack of transportation is a barrier to program participation for such children.

Head Start programs must also collaborate with other community partners that support families who are homeless, including the local education agency McKinney-Vento liaison, to identify and enroll children experiencing homelessness, and to provide appropriate ECE and comprehensive services once children are enrolled. For instance, local organizations can help Head Start programs better meet the needs of highly mobile families. Such families may move between Head Start service areas and require assistance to maintain continuous ECE services for their children. Head Start programs can choose to make special accommodations that allow children to remain in the same program, even when they move out of that program's service area (though this is not required and varies from one program to another).

Given the enhanced focus on children and families experiencing homelessness in the Head Start Act and the HS PPS, the current brief provides a descriptive picture of Head Start children and families experiencing homelessness, including their enrollment numbers and characteristics, as well as services Head Start programs report providing to assist these vulnerable families.

Key Findings

Enrollment Trends for Children and Families Experiencing Homelessness in Head Start

Data from the PIR were used to examine national trends over time in the number of children and families experiencing homelessness who are served by Head Start. As Table 1 shows, the percent of all Head Start children and families that experience homelessness at some point during the program

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[13] To view the Head Start Program Performance Standards, see: https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/policy/45-cfr-chap-xiii.

year has risen steadily since 2006. In the 2006-2007 program year, Head Start served 20,647 children (2.2 percent of all Head Start children) and 18,124 families (2.1 percent of all Head Start families) who experienced homelessness. By 2015-2016, these figures increased to 35,270 children (4.2 percent) and 32,487 families (4.1 percent). However, the percentage of Head Start families experiencing homelessness that successfully acquired housing decreased from 57.5 percent in 2006-2007 to 36.0 percent in 2015-2016.

In 2008 the PIR began to collect information on the number of children deemed eligible during intake to receive Head Start services due to their homeless status. In the 2008-2009 program year, 1.6 percent of Head Start children were initially deemed eligible to receive Head Start services because they were experiencing homelessness (see Table 1).[14] This increased to 3.6 percent by the 2015-2016 program year. It is important to note that these percentages do not represent all children experiencing homelessness in Head Start. The majority of Head Start children are first enrolled in Head Start services because they are from low-income families, though some may also be experiencing homelessness at the time of enrollment (or may become homeless sometime after enrolling).

Table 1. Head Start Children and Families Experiencing Homelessness at Any Point during the Program Year

Program Year	Total Children Served	Total Families Served	Children Eligible for Head Start due to Homelessness (%)	Children Experiencing Homelessness (%)	Families Experiencing Homelessness (%)	Families Experiencing Homelessness Who Acquired Housing (%)
2006-07	922,472	856,408	--	20,647 (2.2)	18,124 (2.1)	10,416 (57.5)
2007-08	918, 137	855,463	--	22,650 (2.5)	20,065 (2.3)	9,853 (49.1)
2008-09	907,843	848,516	14,636 (1.6)	27,418 (3.0)	25,081 (3.0)	10,480 (41.8)
2009-10	927,815	870,970	21,100 (2.3)	31,438 (3.4)	28,933 (3.3)	11,192 (38.7)
2010-11	920,848	861,361	24,135 (2.6)	34,371 (3.7)	31,441 (3.7)	11,712 (37.3)
2011-12	924,795	864,096	27,857 (3.0)	38,820 (4.2)	35,674 (4.1)	12,827 (36.0)
2012-13	911,109	853,992	28,961 (3.2)	36,409 (4.0)	33,866 (4.0)	11,335 (33.5)
2013-14	865,552	814,845	28,783 (3.3)	34,995 (4.0)	32,452 (4.0)	10,623 (32.7)
2014-15	877,840	823,406	29,944 (3.4)	35,871 (4.1)	33,570 (4.1)	10,794 (32.2)
2015-16	837,512	783,912	30,106 (3.6)	35,270 (4.2)	32,487 (4.1)	11,692 (36.0)

Source: PIR data, 2007–2016.
Note: Data collection on the number of children eligible for Head Start because they were experiencing homelessness began in the 2008-2009 program year. Additionally, to align the PIR data more closely with the FACES 2009 sample, all analyses with PIR data in this brief exclude children from Migrant/Seasonal Head Start programs (MSHS) and American Indian/Alaskan Native Head Start programs (AIAN).

Characteristics of Head Start Children Experiencing Homelessness[15]

Data from FACES 2009 were used to provide a descriptive picture of children and families in Head Start experiencing homelessness. A child was considered homeless in FACES 2009 if the child's

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[14] Data on this variable are only available back to the 2008-09 program year.
[15] The findings presented in the remaining sections are based on data from FACES 2009 unless otherwise noted.

family was homeless, living in a homeless shelter or transitional housing, or living in a home with one or more other families. Analyses involved two groups: (1) stably housed families and (2) families who experienced homelessness at some point during the 2009-2010 Head Start program year.

According to FACES 2009 data, about 9.9 percent of newly enrolled 3- and 4-year-olds were experiencing homelessness at Head Start program entry.[16] The majority of these children (95 percent) were living with one or more other families and the remaining 5 percent were literally homeless.

As shown in Table 2, the percentages of Head Start boys versus girls experiencing homelessness were similar to the percentages in stable housing. However, Head Start children experiencing homelessness were more likely to be Hispanic/Latino, and less likely to be African American, than stably housed Head Start children. Children experiencing homelessness were more likely to be from homes where a language other than English was the primary language spoken, and less likely to be from monolingual English homes, compared to children in stable housing.

Table 2. Characteristics of Head Start Children Experiencing Homelessness vs. Stably Housed Head Start Children

Child Characteristics	Homelessness (n = 316)	% of Children Stably Housed (n = 2,789)
Gender		
Girl	49.7	50.4
Boy	50.3	49.6
Ethnicity		
Hispanic/Latino	50.1*	34.5
African American	22.8*	34.1
White	20.2	23.2
Other race/multiracial	6.9	8.3
Home Language[a]		
Monolingual English Home	53.8*	64.7
Language other than English as primary home language	36.7*	24.9

Source: FACES 2009 parent interview data.
*p < .05; children experiencing homelessness are statistically significantly different from stably housed children.
Note: This chart can be read as follows: 50.1 percent of children experiencing homelessness were of Hispanic/Latino origin; conversely, only 34.5 percent of stably housed children were of Hispanic/Latino origin.
[a] For the home language variable, the percentages within each housing group do not add up to 100 because percentages are not presented for children who reside in homes where English is the primary language spoken in the home in addition to one or more non-English languages. About 9.6 percent of children experiencing homeless, and 10.6 percent of stably housed children have English as their primary home language.

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[16] Based on PIR data (as seen in Table 1), only 3.4 percent of Head Start children were experiencing homelessness in 2009-2010. Several factors may explain the higher percentage of children experiencing homelessness in FACES 2009 compared to the PIR. First, FACES 2009 and Head Start capture data on homeless families differently. The FACES 2009 data do not indicate if a family is doubled-up for reasons specifically related to economic hardship vs. families are doubled-up for other reasons *unrelated* to economic hardship. However, the PIR data uses the McKinney-Vento Act definition of homeless, which specifies that doubled-up families are considered homeless if their doubled-up status is due to reasons related to economic hardship. Second, FACES 2009 did *not* include programs located in U.S. Territories, while the PIR does include such programs. Third, for the PIR, grantees answer questions about *all* children and families currently enrolled in their programs (including children that have been enrolled for multiple years), while FACES 2009 only represents 3- and 4-year-olds that entered Head Start *for the first time* in the fall of 2009. Fourth, in FACES 2009, parents directly reported on their children's housing situation, whereas in the PIR, programs report on this. Finally, as little is known at the federal level about how individual programs collect housing data, track families' housing situations over time, and aggregate the data at the grantee-level for the PIR, it is difficult to pinpoint exact reasons for discrepancies across these two data sources. Therefore, it is important not to directly compare findings from the two sources. For more information on these two datasets, see Appendix A.

Characteristics of Head Start Parents and Families Experiencing Homelessness

As Figure 1 shows, Head Start children experiencing homelessness were more likely to have a mother who did not complete high school, and less likely to have a mother who earned a bachelor's degree (or higher), compared to stably housed children.

Figure 1. Mother's Education Level for Children Experiencing Homelessness vs. Stably Housed Children
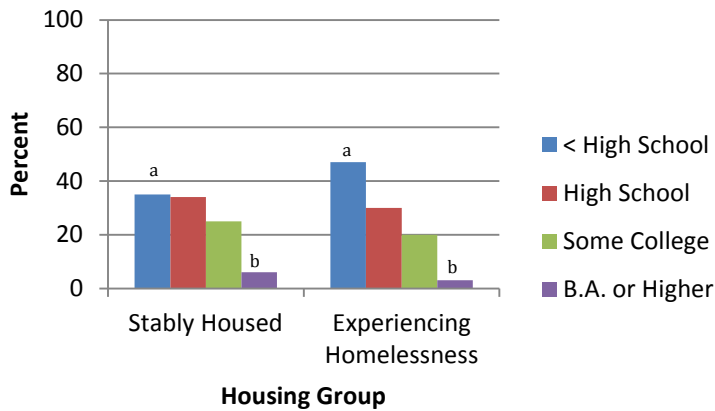
Source: FACES 2009 Parent Interview data. Only represents children living with their mother.
[a] Children experiencing homelessness *more likely* than stably housed children to have a mother who did not complete high school; $p < .05$
[b] Children experiencing homelessness *less likely* than stably housed children to have a mother with a bachelor's degree; $p < .05$

As shown in Table 3, Head Start children experiencing homelessness were more likely to reside in single-parent households and have immigrant parents[17] compared with those in stable housing. In addition, children experiencing homelessness were less likely to have married parents compared with stably housed children. However, there were no differences in mothers' employment status across the two housing groups (the two groups were equally likely to have mothers who were in the labor force, looking for work, or not currently in the labor force).

Compared to stably housed children, children experiencing homelessness were more likely to be the only child in their household under age 17. In addition, children experiencing homelessness were more likely to have moved two or more times in the prior year compared with children in stable housing.

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[17] At least one parent was born outside of the United States.

Table 3. Demographic Characteristics of Head Start Families Experiencing Homelessness vs. Stably Housed Head Start Families

Parent and Family Characteristics[a]	% of Children Experiencing Homelessness (n = 316)	% of Children Stably Housed (n = 2,789)
Immigrant parents	47.1*	32.7
U.S.-born parents	52.9*	67.3
Parent Marital Status		
Single parent	54.9*	47.8
Married parents	21.0*	31.6
Cohabitating, unmarried parents	24.1	20.3
Mother's Employment Status		
Mother working full time	22.4	26.5
Mother working part time	20.1	20.5
Mother looking for work	25.2	21.5
Mother not in the labor force	32.4	31.4
Children in House under Age 17[b]		
One	29.0*	21.2
Two	36.8	36.5
Three	24.8	25.2
Four	7.1*	12.3
Five or more	2.2*	4.8
Family Mobility		
Moved two or more times in past year	16.9*	10.1
Moved one time in past year	27.5	25.4
Moved zero times in past year	55.6*	64.5

Source: FACES 2009 Parent Interview data.

*$p < .05$; children experiencing homelessness are statistically significantly different from stably housed children.

[a] There were no significant differences between the housing groups in mother or father's employment status. Therefore, only percentages for mothers are reported in Table 3.

[b] Number of children under age 17 in the household including the target child.

Note: The table can be interpreted as follows: 47.1 percent of children experiencing homelessness have immigrant parents, whereas only 32.7 percent of stably housed children have immigrant parents. In other words, children experiencing homelessness are more likely to have immigrant parents than children who are stably housed.

Services Offered by Head Start to Children and Families Experiencing Homelessness

In fall 2009, FACES asked program directors to report on activities designed to encourage children and families experiencing homelessness to enroll in Head Start. As indicated in Table 4, Head Start program directors most frequently reported (in order from most to least frequent): contacting agencies serving homeless families; posting information in shelters; sending staff to recruit in shelters; and collaborating with homeless education liaisons. Two-thirds of respondents reported doing some "other" activity to encourage families to enroll. Only 4.3 percent of program directors reported that they did not serve children experiencing homelessness, suggesting that they did not have such children enrolled at the time the data were collected for this study.

Table 4. Activities Head Start Programs Reported Engaging in to Encourage Enrollment of Children and Families Experiencing Homelessness

Program Activities	Percent of Programs
Contact agencies serving homeless families	38.7
Post information in shelters	32.4
Send staff to recruit shelters	31.0
Collaborate with homeless education liaisons	22.6
Other	66.9
Program does not serve homeless children	4.3

Source: FACES Fall 2009 Program Director Interview data

The majority of programs (84.4 percent) reported offering housing assistance to families. These services were most commonly provided off-site (not at the Head Start facility) by a community partner (80.6 percent of programs). A small number of programs provided services directly (22.3 percent) or on-site by a community partner (13.2 percent).

Programs also reported on specific activities to assist families experiencing homelessness. As Table 5 indicates, the most common services provided to assist these families included (from most to least frequent): help with finding temporary shelter, help with finding long-term shelter, transportation to Head Start, additional meetings between parents and staff, accompanying or transporting families to services, scheduling appointments with service providers, and providing financial assistance. Nearly seven in ten programs also reported providing some "other" services to assist families experiencing homelessness. The FACES 2009 data do not provide additional information about these other services.

Table 5. Services Head Start Programs Reported Providing to Assist Families Experiencing Homelessness

Program Services	Percent of Programs
Help finding temporary shelter	49.7
Help finding long-term shelter	35.7
Transportation to Head Start	32.4
Additional meeting between parents and staff	24.4
Accompany or transport families to services	24.0
Schedule appointments with service providers	23.1
Financial assistance	17.8
Other	68.1

Source: FACES Fall 2009 Program Director Interview data

In spring 2010, Head Start parents in the FACES 2009 sample were asked to report on any help with housing that they received, whether or not the assistance came from Head Start. Among the Head Start children in the sample experiencing homelessness, only 3.1 percent of parents reported receiving help with housing.[18] Therefore, although a large number of programs reported providing some kind of housing assistance to families experiencing homelessness, very few families reported receiving such help.

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[18] Because this information was collected in the spring, this analysis includes only those families who were homeless in Fall 2009 and still enrolled in the Head Start program in Spring 2010.

Concluding Thoughts and Implications for Practice and Policy

This brief: (1) explored national trends in the number of Head Start children and families experiencing homelessness; (2) compared the demographics of these families with those of Head Start families who are stably housed; and (3) examined the housing-related services Head Start and their partners provide to families experiencing homelessness.

Since this population of children and families were prioritized for enrollment in the Head Start Act, there have been increases in both: (1) the percentage of children and families initially deemed eligible for enrollment in Head Start because they were experiencing homelessness, and (2) the percentage of Head Start children and families experiencing homelessness overall.

However, it is unclear whether the increase in enrollment of children and families experiencing homelessness is a reflection of: (1) changes in the Head Start Act and programs therefore identifying more at-risk families or (2) an actual increase in the general population of children and families experiencing homelessness (or a combination of the two). The time period during which the data examined in this brief were collected coincided with the housing market crash of 2007, the Great Recession (which lasted from late 2007 to early 2009), and subsequent sharp rises in unemployment rates. According to HUD, these contextual factors may have contributed to an overall increase between 2007 and 2013 in the numbers of households experiencing severe rent burden and inadequate housing.[19] Additionally, according to U.S. Census data, only 50 percent of families could afford to buy a modestly priced home in their area in 2009.[20]

The percentage of Head Start families experiencing homelessness who have since found housing has declined since 2006-2007. One reason for this decline may be that, due to the increased enrollment of children experiencing homelessness and a lack of affordable housing in communities, programs may not have the necessary resources to connect families to needed housing-related services, or there may simply not be enough housing resources available in the local community to assist these families with acquiring stable housing. It is important to continue to provide outreach and training for Head Start staff on identifying families who are in need of stable housing so that these families can be referred to appropriate supports and services through the program or community partners and eventually achieve housing stability.

Compared to stably housed Head Start children, those experiencing homelessness were more likely to have poverty-related risk factors, including residing in single-parent homes, mothers with lower education, and greater residential mobility. Such information can be useful in targeting program outreach efforts and may suggest ways that Head Start programs can identify families at risk for experiencing homelessness. For example, programs could check in with families that have moved multiple times to see if they are in need of additional supports during this time of instability. However, it is important to note that many Head Start children and families (not just those experiencing homelessness) face these same poverty-related risk factors. One exception, however, was employment status; whether a child's parents were employed was unrelated to a family's housing situation. This has important implications for outreach efforts as well; for instance,

19 Steffen, B. L., Carter, G. R., Martin, M., Pelletiere, D., Vandenbroucke, D. A., & Yao, Y. D. (2015). *Worst case housing needs: 2015 Report to Congress.* Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. Retrieved from https://www.huduser.gov/portal/Publications/pdf/WorstCaseNeeds_2015.pdf.
20 Wilson, E., & Callis, R. R. (2013). *Who could afford to buy a home in 2009? Affordability of buying a home in the United States.* Washington, DC: U.S. Census Bureau. Retrieved from https://www.census.gov/prod/2013pubs/h121-13-02.pdf.

programs should not assume that families with employed parents necessarily have a stable housing arrangement.

A number of factors related to a family's cultural or linguistic background were also associated with experiencing homelessness. These included living in a home where a language other than English was the primary language spoken to the child, having an immigrant parent, and being of Hispanic/Latino origin. Head Start programs interested in further assisting these families could ensure that efforts to identify families experiencing homelessness and connect them with services are conducted in a linguistically and culturally responsive manner. For instance, written materials could be made available in multiple languages, and program management could ensure that the family service worker (or appropriate staff person) is able to easily communicate with families in their native language. Programs could strive to make community referrals that are an appropriate match linguistically and culturally for families or, if possible, programs could choose to accompany families to the partner agency, provide interpreters, and ensure that families can communicate effectively.

Head Start programs reported engaging in a variety of activities intended to enroll and serve children and families experiencing homelessness. Over half of programs reported engaging in some "other" (unspecified) activity to enroll or serve these families. Further research is needed to understand the nature of these "other" activities and whether they are meeting families' needs.

Even though programs reported engaging in a variety of activities to assist families, very few families reported receiving housing assistance. For the families who do request housing assistance, there is limited information available at the federal level about how programs can ensure that families receive these services. The majority of programs report that they refer families to an off-site community partner to receive housing-related services; very little is known about the capacity of these community partners to assist the growing number of families in need of housing services.

Limitations and Future Research

The FACES 2009 sample provides national information about Head Start programs, centers, and classrooms, and the children and families they serve. However, some Head Start programs are not represented in FACES 2009, including Migrant and Seasonal Head Start programs, American Indian-Alaskan Native Head Start programs, programs in Puerto Rico and other U.S. territories, and Early Head Start programs that serve infants and toddlers. Future research could examine the characteristics of and services for families experiencing homelessness in these other Head Start programs. Research is also needed to better understand the kinds of efforts and outreach that programs are using to assist these families (particularly because a large percentage of programs reported engaging in "other" activities). In addition, it could be useful to explore how successful different program activities are in assisting families experiencing homelessness; how programs select and work with community partners; whether programs consistently follow up to ensure that these families receive necessary housing-related services; and areas where programs could use more support in their work with these vulnerable families (for example, assistance identifying families who are homeless or identifying and connecting these families to community resources).

General Conclusions

Children experiencing homelessness are a particularly vulnerable group with unique needs and challenges. As a comprehensive early childhood program that specifically targets children who experience homelessness, Head Start can play an important role in connecting these at-risk children and families to community resources and services to support them during this time of instability and help address their housing needs. However, despite attempts by programs to provide and connect families to such services, additional efforts may be needed to ensure that families receive effective services. When identifying and working with these at-risk families, it is also important for Head Start programs to consider the perspective of the family and the variety of cultural factors that may be related to a family's housing situation. The findings in this brief provide practitioners, policymakers, and researchers with a portrait of families experiencing homelessness in Head Start, and may suggest promising strategies for enrolling and connecting these families with needed services to potentially reduce the negative impacts of homelessness on their children's development.

Appendix A: Methodology and Data Sources

The analyses described in this brief used data from both the Office of Head Start (OHS) Program Information Report (PIR) and the 2009 cohort of the Head Start Family and Child Experiences Survey (FACES) to examine the characteristics of Head Start children and families experiencing homelessness and the services provided by Head Start to these families.

The Program Information Report (PIR)
Each year, all Head Start grantees and delegate agencies are required to submit Program Information Reports (PIR) to OHS. These reports provide comprehensive descriptive information at the grantee and program level about Head Start children, families, and staff during the prior program year. The PIR is completed by program directors and administrative staff using a common self-report protocol. This brief used data from the PIR program years 2006-2007 through 2015-2016 to create a national picture of the number of children and families experiencing homelessness in Head Start and the services they received. The 2006-2007 program year provides a glimpse of housing trends right before the 2007 Head Start reauthorization, and the 2007-2008 through 2015-2016 program years highlight trends following reauthorization. To align the PIR data more closely with the FACES 2009 sample, all analyses with PIR data in this brief exclude children from Migrant/Seasonal Head Start programs (MSHS), American Indian/Alaskan Native Head Start programs (AIAN) and Early Head Start programs.

The Head Start Family and Child Experiences (FACES) 2009 Survey
Because information from the PIR is aggregated at the grantee level, it cannot illustrate the experiences of individual children and families served by Head Start programs. Therefore, the current brief also used FACES data, which allow for analyses at the child and family level. FACES is a nationally representative cohort study of 3-and 4-year-old children enrolled in Head Start, first launched in 1997. Six separate FACES cohorts have been fielded: 1997, 2000, 2003, 2006, 2009, and 2014. Study designs, measures, and procedures have been similar across the cohorts, with some variation. FACES is a rich source of descriptive information on Head Start programs, including characteristics of the population served; staff qualifications, credentials, and opinions; Head Start classroom practices and quality measures; and child and family outcomes. FACES includes a battery of child assessments across many developmental domains; interviews with parents, teachers, and program managers; and observations of classroom quality.

This brief used data from FACES 2009, which includes 3- and 4-year-old children who entered Head Start in fall 2009, their families, and program staff. The children were drawn from 60 programs and 129 centers across the United States. Child- and program-level data are weighted to represent all newly entering Head Start children and programs serving newly entering children in fall 2009 program year. The majority of the data in the current brief were collected in fall 2009. However, data on families' use of program services were collected in spring 2010. Compared to the earlier FACES cohorts and the 2014 cohort, FACES 2009 data are unique in that they offer more detailed information about homelessness and services provided by Head Start programs. In response to requirements in the Head Start Act for serving children and families experiencing homelessness, as well as the struggling economy, housing instability became one of several priority areas for FACES 2009. Questions were added to the parent and staff interview protocols regarding families' housing situations and programs' supports for families experiencing homelessness.[21]

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[21] For more information on the design of FACES 2009, see West, J., Tarullo, L., Aikens, N., Malone, L., and Carlson, B. L. (2011). *FACES 2009 Study Design*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation. Retrieved from https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/opre/study_2009.pdf.