

# Emergency Food and Shelter Program

The program prevents dependency by providing emergency services to individuals and families on a limited basis so they can remain self-sufficient.

## What is the Emergency Food and Shelter Program?

The Emergency Food and Shelter Program (EFSP) meets the needs of hungry and homeless people and those at risk of becoming homeless due to emergency and/or economic downturn by allocating federal funds to supplement the work of local agencies providing food, shelter, and utility assistance. EFSP funds are used to provide served meals or groceries, lodging in a mass shelter or hotel, and one month's rent, mortgage, or utility payment in a given year. The program prevents dependency by providing emergency services to individuals and families on a limited basis so they can remain self-sufficient. The General Accounting Office found that EFSP is "the only source of funding for the prevention of homelessness" in most parts of the country, and recommended strengthening the program through increased federal investment.

Since its inception in 1983, EFSP has distributed over \$2 billion in more than 2,500 cities and counties. With the participation of more than 11,500 local non-profit, faith-based and government agencies, it is an extraordinary example of a public/private partnerships tailored to the most pressing needs of communities and families. It is these agencies that provide care and services in the event of emergency and/or economic downturn — a testament to the flexibility of the program. EFSP distributes funds to the neediest areas of the country quickly, incurring less than three percent in administrative costs. In FY 2001 with funding of only \$140 million, EFSP provided:

- 89.2 million meals
- 4.2 million nights of shelter
- 192,328 utility payments
- 160,442 rent and mortgage payments

## What is the status of EFSP?

United Way urges Congress and the Administration to increase federal support for EFSP to ensure that this limited but critical assistance is available for those families who need it most. United Way calls for EFSP to be funded at

\$200 million for FY 2005. We also encourage Congress and the Administration to keep EFSP within the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), where it has worked quickly and effectively as a prevention and emergency intervention program for the past 20 years. FEMA's orientation to providing emergency services in a timely manner through networks of faith-based and community organizations has brought proven results for EFSP.

In its FY 2004 "Views and Estimates" Report, the House Financial Services Committee expressed concern about the proposal to transfer EFSP to HUD:

The Committee has been pleased with the level of efficiency in distributing emergency funds when natural disaster and other events warranted Federal assistance to families who needed emergency food and shelter. In light of HUD's track record in taking as long as one year to disperse homeless assistance grants, the Committee is concerned that the level of efficiency in the Emergency Food and Shelter program would be compromised. Sen. Susan Collins (R-ME) has introduced S.2249, a bill to reauthorize EFSP for the next three years. All non-governmental members of the National Board endorse the bill.

## United Way and EFSP

EFSP is governed by a National Board of representatives of the six agencies designated by Congress, and is chaired by a representative of FEMA. United Way of America is the Secretariat and Fiscal Agent to the Board, thereby relieving FEMA of the majority of administrative burden. In fact, no money from the EFSP grant goes towards the salary of a full-time employee at FEMA. EFSP ensures local decision-making because local boards, similar in composition to the National Board, determine which service providers in their communities receive funds. Virtually every county or metropolitan area is represented by a local board. Funding for EFSP is allocated through the U.S. Department of Homeland Security appropriations bill.

## Members of the EFSP National Board:

Federal Emergency Management Agency, *Chair*  
American Red Cross  
Catholic Charities USA

National Council of Churches of Christ  
in the USA

The Salvation Army

United Jewish Communities

United Way of America, *Secretariat and  
Fiscal Agent*

## Funding for EFSP is Not Keeping Pace with Inflation or Increases in Need and Unmet Demand

- A United Way of America survey in 2000 of 800 EFSP-funded agencies found a 30% average increase in demand for emergency food, shelter, rent, mortgage, and utility assistance.
- The U.S. Conference of Mayors' "2001 Status Report on Hunger and Homelessness in America's Cities" finds that 13% of the demand for emergency food and 23% of the demand for emergency shelter go unmet. It also documents a 17% increase in demand for emergency food and a 15% increase in demand for emergency shelter.

- A 2000 Housing and Urban Development study found that 4.9 million unassisted, very-low-income renter households pay over half their income for housing or live in severely inadequate housing.
- The Salvation Army Sixth Interim Report on Welfare Reform reports applicants for housing assistance typically paying in excess of 50% of their incomes for rent.
- The number of people served by Catholic Charities USA increased 32% for emergency food and 15% for utility assistance in 1999.
- The U.S. Department of Agriculture discovered that in 1998, over 10% of, or 10.5 million, households experienced food insecurity, defined as limited or uncertain access to enough safe, nutritious food.
- According to the National Energy Assistance Directors Association, 4.9 million families need energy bill aid.

For More Information Contact: Patrick McIntyre,  
Director, Public Policy & Partners,  
United Way of America, 703 836-7112, Ext. 496,  
[patrick.mcintyre@uwa.unitedway.org](mailto:patrick.mcintyre@uwa.unitedway.org)