



# Athens Area Homeless Health Care Cost Analysis 2005

The direct economic costs of homelessness can be very high, but often there are hidden costs, that are not even seen. One such case is the cost burden imposed by a large homeless population on local health care providers.

Athens-Clarke County has two major regional hospitals – St. Mary’s and Athens Regional. The Department of Human and Economic Development (HED) is the division of the local government tasked with conducting the annual homeless population (point in time) count.

In 2006, HED, with the cooperation of Athens Regional and St. Mary’s hospitals, attempted to determine the cost incurred in providing emergency health care for the homeless population. Because they have no regular place to stay, people who are homeless use a variety of public systems in an inefficient and costly way.

## Method

HED provided a list of 891 Social Security Numbers collected during the homeless population count to ARMC and St. Mary’s Hospitals, to ascertain the number of visits and cost of services provided to these individuals, over the previous 12 months.

## Findings

These individuals accounted for :

- 7,000 total visits in 2005; including emergency room, inpatient or outpatient visits
  - 611 inpatient visits average cost \$11,470 each
  - 1,692 outpatient visits average cost \$1,050 each
  - 4,687 emergency room visits average cost \$690 each
- 700 ambulance rides costing a total of approximately \$339,000
- Total area hospital costs attributable to homeless individuals: **\$12.378 million** \*

## Breakdowns

- 576 homeless individuals accounted for approximately 7,000 total visits  
That averages to 583 visits per month for homeless care
- 355 homeless individuals went through the emergency room and at least one other entry point i.e. inpatient or outpatient services
- 234 homeless individuals visited the hospitals 8 or more times each resulting in a total cost of more than \$4.2 million, at an average cost of \$19,950 per individual.
- The top 3 most costly homeless individuals accounted for over \$310,000 in costs
- The top 1 most costly homeless person accounted for over \$195,000 in inpatient health care costs, alone.

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\* This figure does not factor in the number of homeless **children** treated at Athens area hospitals.

## Times of Arrival at the Emergency Room

Shifts	# of visits
12 a.m. – 6 a.m.	15 (8%)
6 a.m. - noon	50 (27%)
noon – 6 p.m.	67 (37%)
6 p.m. - midnight	51 (28%)

Of the 891 homeless individuals on the list, 434 or 49% are also clients of Advantage Behavioral Health Systems and have been diagnosed with a mental health or addictive disorder or both.

Preventing a homeless episode or ensuring a speedy transition into stable permanent housing can result in a significant cost savings.

Type of Service	Total Visits	Frequency				Total Cost	Average Cost per Visit
		1-2 Visits	3-5 Visits	5-8 Visits	> 8 Visits		
Inpatient	611	174	57	16	6	7,008,763	11,471
Emergency Room	4,687	178	120	77	173	3,240,920	691
Outpatient	1,692	175	78	27	55	1,789,392	1,058
Ambulance	700	174	50	18	12	339,500	485
<b>Totals</b>	<b>7,690</b>	<b>701</b>	<b>305</b>	<b>138</b>	<b>246</b>	<b>12,378,574</b>	<b>13,705</b>

Type of Service	> 8 Visits	Number of Visits per individual			Cost per individual		
		Minimum	Average	Maximum	Minimum	Average	Maximum
Inpatient	6	10	11.83	17	114,710	135,702	195,006
Emergency Room	173	9	19.86	66	6,223	13,733	45,637
Outpatient	55	9	17.76	66	9,518	18,782	69,799

