

L.A.'s poorer neighborhoods underserved by human services nonprofits, study finds

March 6 2013, by Alex Boekelheide

Poorer neighborhoods in Los Angeles County have less access than other local communities to nonprofit organizations that provide shelter, food, job training, alcohol and substance abuse counseling, and other basic services, according to a new study released by the Center for Civil Society at the UCLA Luskin School of Public Affairs.

Predominantly African American communities are hardest hit, the research shows.

"Spread Thin: Human Services Organizations in Poor Neighborhoods" reveals that poorer neighborhoods, where needs are the greatest, have fewer human services nonprofits than middle- and upper-income neighborhoods across the county. This is especially true in South Los Angeles and in high-poverty areas in the San Fernando Valley.

"The [spatial distribution](#) of human services nonprofits in Los Angeles County is quite unequal," said UCLA Luskin [social welfare](#) professor Zeke Hasenfeld, the lead author of the survey. "As is often the case with access to jobs and healthy foods, sections of Los Angeles County are like urban deserts when it comes to the lack of human services nonprofit organizations that are vital to improving the quality of life in poor neighborhoods."

Published with support from the Ralph M. Parsons Foundation, "Spread Thin" follows up on a 2011 survey of Los Angeles human services nonprofits conducted by the UCLA Center for Civil Society that

documented the rising demands and falling revenues of these nonprofits over the past decade.

"Following the results of the [2011 survey](#), we wanted to go deeper, to try to gauge the 'where, what, why' of human services nonprofits in high-[poverty neighborhoods](#)," said Bill Parent, acting director of the center.

Among the report's findings:

- Nearly one-fourth of the census tracts in Los Angeles County have no established human services nonprofit organizations, according to publicly available nonprofit tax records. These tracts are mostly concentrated in South Los Angeles and the San Fernando Valley.
- Human services nonprofits in poor neighborhoods are relatively small, with a median revenue of \$430,160—less than half the overall median revenue (\$962,426) for human services nonprofits in the county.
- Human services nonprofits in poorer neighborhoods are primarily dependent on private donations, including foundation support, and receive significantly less government funding than the average human services organization in the county.
- Nonprofits that experienced reductions in government funding cited cutbacks in federal community-development block grants and in Housing and Urban Development assistance that encompasses services to the homeless and mortgage and foreclosure support, as well as state CalWORKs and funding from the California Department of Mental Health.
- Organizations serving poor and predominantly African American [neighborhoods](#) face distinct challenges. They are smaller and less likely to obtain government funding, and they must compete with

nonprofits with similar missions in terms of private giving. At the same time, however, these organizations' staffing patterns, boards of directors and management practices are on a par with organizations of similar size across Los Angeles County.

"What is most disturbing is that the state and federal governments are continuing to make cuts in human services to balance their budgets," Parent said. "The safety net as we know it is smaller and weaker, particularly for those most in need."

'Spread Thin' findings to be presented at March 5 conference

Highlights from "Spread Thin: Human Services Organizations in [Poor Neighborhoods](#)" will be presented during a March 5 event at the Center for Civil Society's annual conference on the state of the Los Angeles nonprofit sector, to be held at the Skirball Center. The event is presented in partnership with Southern California Grantmakers. The report will be posted to the Center for Civil Society's [website](#) on March 5.

Provided by University of California, Los Angeles

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