

Economic impact of hunger affects all Americans

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While thirty-five million Americans feel the physical effects of hunger each day, every household and individual in our nation feels the economic effects. So finds a new study released today by the Sodexo Foundation and researchers affiliated with Harvard University School of Public Health, Brandeis University and Loyola University.

The study, titled “The Economic Cost of Domestic Hunger: Estimated Annual Burden to the United States,” finds that the U.S. pays more than \$90 billion annually for the direct and indirect costs of hunger-related charities, illness and psychosocial dysfunction and the impact of less education/lower productivity. These costs are borne by all Americans.

Distributed on an individual basis, it means that on average, each person residing in the U.S. pays \$300 annually for the hunger bill. Distributed on a household basis, it means that the annual cost is closer to \$800 each year. And calculated on a lifetime basis, each individual’s bill for hunger in the nation is nearly \$22,000.

The study found that the lion’s share of the overall cost, \$66.8 billion, resulted from illness associated with hunger, said Brandeis health economist Donald Shepard, who led the economic analysis. These illnesses included iron deficiency, colds and depression, and other causes of fair and poor health.

“What was unusual about hunger was the wide range of problems associated with it, which included not only the illness burden, but also

expenses on food pantries and other charities to mitigate the problem, and lost productivity due to hunger's adverse impact on learning," said Shepard.

"The Cost of Hunger study is a call to action for communities, legislators, the private sector and individuals to look at hunger as more than a social issue – hunger also is an economic issue," said Stephen J. Brady, president of the Sodexo Foundation. "As such, it is everyone's responsibility to end hunger. The first step is to be aware of the magnitude of the impact of hunger on every American."

Source: Brandeis University

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