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getting back into housing," says Marc Jolin, JOIN's executive director.

For example, Jolin says, federal funds may pay for rent for a couple of months to get someone into housing, but it won't pay for a deposit or for the application fee. That's where local funds connect the dots.

The numbers of people coming to JOIN looking for assistance to housing is growing, Jolin says. So is the number of people who have gotten into housing, but because of the prolonged economic stagnation, are now coming back looking for eviction prevention.

"We're definitely continuing to see the number of folks actually on the streets and in vehicles and in the shelters grow," Jolin says. "The recession has dragged on long enough that a lot of people who were just barely making it month-to-month, then went to a couch-surfing arrangement, have worn out that opportunity and really have no place left but the streets."

There are already more than 1,700 homeless people sleeping outdoors every night, according to the city and Multnomah County's 2011 one-night count. That's out of more than 4,600 counted as homeless. Waiting lists for transitional housing in the

city average from several weeks to several months, with hundreds of people waiting to get into housing this past winter. The Housing Bureau estimates that an 8 percent budget cut will mean thousands more people will be turned away from services, including nearly 500 from winter shelter, and nearly 1,400 who won't get housing retention services or assistance to secure Social Security benefits.

But what is more difficult to quantify are the numbers of those who haven't hit the bottom yet. The city estimates that the number of households who are "doubled up" to make ends meet is four times the numbers on the streets or shelters. In the last one-night homeless count, the number of unsheltered families had increased by 35 percent since 2009.

Liesl Wendt is the CEO of 211Info, a central call center for social services, which receives \$240,000 for the referral service, the Housing Connections website and for severe weather shelter. Last year, her organization received nearly 28,000 calls for referrals related to housing issues from Portland residents alone. The top three needs were energy assistance, rent assistance and shelter.

"I'm worried because I don't think people realize how thin the safety net has gotten over the past couple of years," Wendt says.

"We're hearing from more and more people who don't know what to ask for, who have not accessed services before, who don't understand the complexity of asking for a few dollars to keep their lights on. More people are tumbling into the chaos of what being low-income is in our community," Wendt says. "We hear from people who are trying to keep their lights on and stay in their homes. And three weeks out of the month, there aren't resources available to them for rent or utility assistance. So we make a referral to food pantry. And clients and food pantries tell us

that their boxes are getting smaller and smaller because they've been deluged by people going there trying to stretch their dollars. People are struggling to pay their bills and put food on their tables for the families. And the safety net is doing everything it can, but there just isn't enough in it."

Fish says he's heading into the budget negotiations with the position that the \$4.8 million is secured from the outset, before other requests. "We're still in a recession," Fish says. "A lot of people are still hurting. We cannot go backward on our commitment."

"If you don't spend the money upstream with short-term rent assistance, you'll have more people on the streets, in the emergency rooms, and we'll end up as a community spending more downstream," Fish says. "If we don't invest in homebuyers, we'll have more in foreclosure. If we don't invest in shelter and emergency services, more people will be put at risk on the streets, and that leads to a spiral. The \$4.8 million is a modest investment. If we don't make that investment we're going to pay substantially more downstream."

Another dynamic in the budget cycle this year is the fact that at least two members of City Council, Adams and Randy Leonard — who corner the public safety budgets on the council — will be out of office after this year, leaving the completion of their budgets to new office holders.

This is the first in what will be many of years budget declines for the bureau as the tax increment financing revenues from urban renewal districts drop to a fraction of their value. This prompts the question of where new revenue will come from. To that, Fish suggested a larger community discussion and even a decision by voters.

"We're going to have to find a way to deal with that structural problem," Fish says.

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— LIESL WENDT  
CEO OF 211INFO

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Tuesday, April 10  
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