

# Turning the Tide on Homelessness

in New York City



**The City of New York**  
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# Executive Summary

## Introduction

Today, we face a new kind of homelessness that is driven by years of wages not keeping up with the cost of housing in our city. It's caused pain for millions and deep pain for thousands of people who have become homeless. You may see them in the line at the grocery store, or in the bank, or at work. And you may never know that at night they return to a shelter instead of a home. Today, 70 percent of shelter residents are families. They are the invisible majority of our homeless crisis. For decades, the City has not done enough both these New Yorkers and the communities where they are sheltered.

This report outlines how we turn the tide on this crisis, neighborhood by neighborhood.

Our vision relies on three approaches:

- First, doing more to keep people in their homes by making housing more affordable and stopping illegal evictions.
- Second, making long-needed operational reforms to better serve people in shelters and neighborhoods.
- Third, a reimagined shelter strategy that:
  - Removes people from all cluster apartment units by the end of 2021 and commercial hotel facilities by the end of 2023;
  - Cuts the total number of shelter facilities by almost 45%;
  - Keeps homeless people as close as possible to their own neighborhoods and on a path to get back on track.

The homelessness crisis we face is the result of decades of changes in our economy and past choices made in New York City, Albany and Washington. In the first month of the Giuliani Administration, there were 23,868 New Yorkers in shelters. In the first month of the Bloomberg Administration, that had risen to 31,009. In the first month of the de Blasio Administration, there were more than 51,470 people in our shelters.

As the number of New Yorkers in shelter grew, the City's approach to homelessness has changed many times over the years. The shelters we have today are essentially the product of decades of short-term responses to an evolving long-term problem leading to people being sheltered in unfamiliar neighborhoods -- far from work, school and family.

Today begins a new approach, building on what has worked in the past, rejecting what hasn't worked and implementing a new, 21st century response to the 21st century reality of homelessness.

We must be clear-eyed: it will take many years to reset the unacceptable status quo we see today. But this plan puts us in the best possible position for the future. Our efforts to date have stabilized the number of people in our shelters, which are now trending downward. This new strategy will help us to reduce a shelter population that has been

steadily rising for 35 years. We will reduce the number of people in our shelters by 2,500 over five years.

The de Blasio Administration is using every tool at its disposal to address homelessness. We are ahead of schedule on the largest affordable housing plan ever. We created a rental assistance program to fill in the gap left by the cancellation of a crucial New York State program six years ago. We aggressively expanded free legal assistance for New Yorkers in danger of illegal eviction. We implemented 46 systematic reforms to streamline how we handle homelessness. We doubled the previous investment in shelter security.

Today, the City's level of street homelessness is lower than it is in other major cities including Los Angeles, San Francisco and Seattle. This is in part because of our innovative and proactive street outreach programs including HOME-STAT. That work has just begun, but it has already brought 690 homeless people off the street and we are confident that this success will deepen over time.

The results are clear and measurable: 51,500 people moved from shelter to housing, or prevented from falling into homelessness; 161,000 households kept in their homes, and the end of chronic homelessness among our veterans. After increasing for a decade, the number of people in Department of Homeless Services (DHS) shelters is now stable at 60,000, rather than growing to nearly 70,000, which it would have done without our efforts.

We recognize that none of these measures are sufficient to address this crisis. There are no silver bullets here. We will not solve this crisis over night. It will be a long, hard fight.

We will get out of all 360 cluster sites and commercial hotel facilities and replace them with a much smaller number of shelters. We will open approximately 90 new shelters and expand approximately 30 existing shelters. Our goal is to open approximately 20 new shelters in 2017 and 20 new shelters in 2018. As part of this plan, we aim to develop five new high-quality shelters per year. In addition, we will open shelters in existing buildings. Renovation of the approximately 30 expansion sites will begin in 2018 and take place on a rolling basis over the next seven years. To avoid disruption in the lives of people already housed in these buildings, the City will open 12 temporary locations for them.

Our new shelters will be clean. The NYPD will oversee security. There will be career counselors, mental health and substance use disorder counselors and other services on site. Our goal will be to keep residents in the boroughs they called home when possible, so that breadwinners do not lose jobs, children do not have to switch schools or experience long commutes and people can also be close to their medical needs and preferred places of worship.

We know this plan can't be implemented without the help of New Yorkers, which is why we're committed to reforming the way we communicate with neighborhoods. Our community advisory boards for each shelter will ensure an open dialogue around shelter issues directly after new sites open. We will have a clear shelter opening notification framework, and will distribute shelters more equitably over time.

Now, as a city, we are confronting homelessness head on, openly and honestly. Many of the factors that create homelessness are out of our control, but City government must do all that it can to help these New Yorkers. But the City can't do it alone – we need families, community leaders and faith-based organizations to help.

## The Rise of Homelessness in NYC

From 1994 to 2014, the Department of Homeless Services (DHS) shelter census skyrocketed 115 percent. At the same time, the City lost hundreds of thousands of affordable or rent stabilized units. This steady decline in housing affordability has driven many low- and middle-income families into homelessness.

The scale of this affordability crisis is vast:

- Between 2000 and 2014, the median New York City rent increased by 19 percent in real dollars and household income decreased by 6.3 percent in real dollars.
- In 2016, a family of three with a household income of \$24,500 (equivalent to 30 percent of the HUD Income Limit for 2016) could afford to pay approximately \$613 per month in rent and utilities—a figure well under half of the City's 2015 median gross rent of \$1,317.
- According to the Housing New York plan, between 1994 and 2012 the City suffered a net loss of approximately 150,000 rent stabilized apartments.

This affordability crisis was made worse for working New Yorkers in April 2011, when the City and State ended the Advantage rental assistance program. The program, which began in 2007 had offered subsidies for people in shelters if they took part in job training. In the years following its elimination, from January 2011 to January 2014, the shelter population increased 14,000 people.

## What the Department of Homeless Services Does

DHS collaborates with nonprofit organizations to provide temporary shelter and services that homeless New Yorkers, including those living on the street, need to help stabilize their lives and achieve housing permanency. In April 2016, Mayor de Blasio announced a major restructuring of the way homeless services in New York City are delivered, creating an integrated and streamlined management structure for DHS

and the Human Resources Administration (HRA) under the Commissioner of the Department of Social Services. DHS and HRA work together to prevent homelessness before it occurs, and to help individuals and families transition to permanent housing and self-sufficiency.

## **Keeping People in Their Homes and Moving Them Off the Streets**

Making housing affordable, providing rental assistance, supportive housing initiatives, providing legal assistance and moving more people off the streets.

### **Affordable Housing: 200,000 Affordable Apartments Preserved**

The de Blasio Administration released Housing New York: A Five-Borough, 10-Year Housing Plan to build or preserve 200,000 affordable apartments. A portion of these homes are dedicated for low-income and homeless New Yorkers. In just three years we have financed a record 62,506 affordable residences. The scale of development and preservation of affordable housing outpaces any three-year period since the late 1980s. The City exceeded its benchmarks in financing affordable housing for families earning less than \$40,000 due to the success of newly created programs.

### **Affordable Housing Update: 10,000 Apartments for Hardworking New Yorkers, Seniors and Veterans**

In 2017, the City committed \$1.9 billion to expand our housing program's focus on seniors, veterans and other low-income families. We are increasing by 10,000 the number of apartments in our housing plan serving households earning less than \$40,000. Five thousand of these apartments will be dedicated to seniors and 500 of them will be for veterans.

### **Added Rental Assistance for Seniors: Helping more than 25,000 Seniors**

If Albany passes our proposed Mansion Tax, we will create a new Elder Rental Assistance program to help more than 25,000 seniors stay in their homes with monthly rental assistance of up to \$1,300.

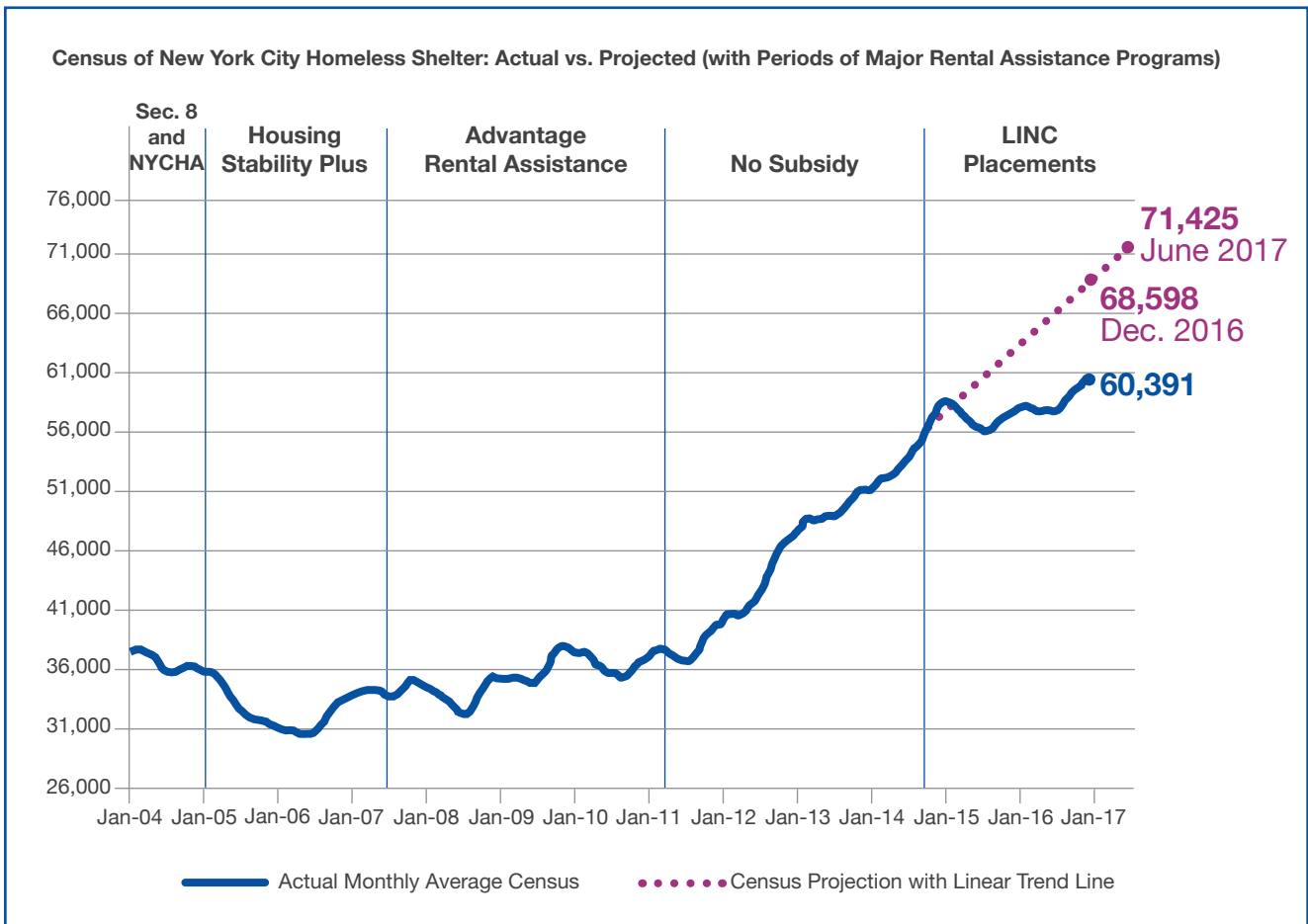
### **Rental Assistance and Rehousing Initiatives: 51,500 People Secure Permanent Housing**

In 2014, the de Blasio Administration stepped in to immediately fill the gap left by the cancellation of the Advantage Rental Assistance program three years earlier. Living in Communities (LINC) provides people with rental assistance to move out of shelter, partly making up for the loss of Advantage. In 2015, we added two other supports: City Family Eviction Prevention Supplement/Family Exit Plan Supplement (CityFEPS) and

the Special Exit and Prevention Supplement (SEPS), which provide rental assistance to people leaving shelter. This was the first time in three years that City or State had offered this kind of rental assistance to families, and the first time ever that the City created its own rental assistance program for individuals. We coupled this with funding and incentives for landlords and brokers to rehouse the homeless. Further, we reopened Section 8 housing vouchers and New York City Housing Authority apartments to a targeted number of homeless families. Due to these efforts, we helped 51,500 mostly homeless people secure permanent housing

**Emergency Rental Assistance: 161,000 Rent-Burdened Households at Risk of Eviction**

We provided emergency rental assistance to 161,000 households, helping rent-burdened New Yorkers at risk of eviction stay in their homes.





### **Supportive Housing: 15,000 New Units in 15 years**

The Administration launched the largest municipal commitment ever to build and expand housing with services, including case management, mental health and substance use disorder treatment and counseling, access to medical care, and other social and supportive services. Supportive housing has a proven record of helping stabilize lives and reducing reliance on homeless shelters, hospitals, mental health institutions and jail. We created the Mayor’s Supportive Housing Task Force to analyze the best way to develop and deliver our plan. The City has already awarded contracts for the first 550 units, which will be ready this year. The Task Force has developed essential reforms to ensure that these units are prioritized for those most in need.

### **Legal Assistance: 40,000 New Yorkers Able to Stay in Their Homes**

In Housing Court, landlords have almost always had a lawyer. Tenants rarely have one. The de Blasio Administration increased funding for legal services for tenants more than 10-fold to \$62 million. Evictions then dropped by 24% and more than 40,000 New Yorkers were able to stay in their homes in 2015 and 2016.

### **Legal Assistance Update: Now Available to Every New Yorker Facing Eviction**

In 2017, the City made a commitment to providing universal access to legal services for all New York City tenants facing eviction in housing court phased in over five years. All people facing eviction will have access to free legal assistance and all people with low incomes will have full legal representation.

We will provide free legal representation in court to New Yorkers with household incomes below \$50,000 (200 percent of the federal poverty level for a family of four), and legal counseling to those earning more. The City estimates an additional 400,000 New Yorkers each year will come to housing court backed by quality legal assistance when this initiative is fully operational.

### **Street Homelessness: Moved 690 People Off the Streets**

The de Blasio Administration created HOME-STAT, a successful homelessness outreach effort that doubled the number of street outreach staff and is the largest street homelessness initiative in the United States. Last year, the City moved 690 people into transitional programs or permanent housing. The City also expanded the NYPD Crisis Outreach and Support Unit, focusing on assisting street homeless individuals both directly and in partnership with outreach workers and other City agencies.

## **Making Long-Needed Operation Reforms**

Improving shelter conditions, making investments in security and ending chronic veteran homelessness.

### **90-Day Review: In-Depth Review Results in 46 Reforms**

At the Mayor's direction, the Administration took an in-depth look at homeless services to make them stronger and more efficient. This resulted in major changes. The City created an integrated management structure with both HRA and DHS reporting to a single Commissioner of Social Services, allowing the two agencies to be more effective, more cost efficient and pursue a unified mission. The review identified 46 reforms aimed at preventing homelessness, addressing street homelessness, improving conditions and safety in shelter, and helping New Yorkers transition from shelter to permanent housing. (In addition, homeless prevention operations have now been streamlined and consolidated under HRA's Homelessness Prevention Administration. Similarly, rehousing efforts are run by a single unified team.)

### **Shelter Conditions: Inspections Up 84%, Violations Down 83%**

The administration created the Shelter Repair Scorecard to publicly report on building violations in all shelter buildings, and the Shelter Repair Squad, a multi-agency task force that inspects buildings and repairs violations. In 2016, the City conducted almost 16,000 inspections—a 84% increase from 2015 —and fixed more than 14,000 code violations with nonprofit shelter providers. The number of outstanding violations within traditional shelters has dropped 83% since January 2016.

### **Closing Cluster Apartments: Removed 647 Cluster Apartment Units**

The City has already gotten out of 647 cluster sites, prioritizing units with the most serious problems and is moving to end the use of cluster units altogether.

### **Security: Doubled Investments, NYPD Takes the Lead**

In 2016, The New York Police Department (NYPD) conducted a comprehensive review of security at homeless shelters and began making immediate improvements at shelters and commercial hotels across the City. The Administration doubled the 2013 investment in DHS security, with a total annual security spending of \$217 million for fiscal year 2017.

### **Security Update: NYPD Now in Charge**

In 2017, NYPD announced it will begin overseeing DHS security. This includes standardizing and professionalizing security, surveillance, staff training and deployment. The NYPD is making shelters safer.

## **Standing Up for Veterans: Placed 3,153 Homeless Veterans into Permanent Housing**

In 2015, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development declared chronic veteran homelessness a thing of the past. The City implemented a number of innovative policies, procedures, and strategies aimed at connecting veterans to quality housing resources and worked with local communities and ran public outreach campaigns to urge landlords to house homeless veterans. Over three years, the City placed 3,153 homeless veterans into permanent housing and reduced the overall number of homeless veterans by two-thirds.

## **Reimagining the Shelter Strategy**

Closes clusters and hotels, almost halves the number of locations New Yorkers are sheltered, keeps people in their neighborhoods and puts people on a path to get lives back on track.

Today, thanks to this Administration's efforts, the number of people in our shelters has stabilized for the first time in years. Now we will overhaul our shelters to distribute resources and responsibility in a more equitable way across the city and finally begin to reduce the shelter population for the first time in a decade.

## **Closing All Cluster Apartments and Commercial Hotel Facilities: Shrinking the Shelter Footprint**

Over the course of this plan, we will get out of every single one of the 360 cluster apartment sites and commercial hotel facilities and replace them with approximately 90 new shelters. We will also renovate and expand the capacity of approximately 30 existing shelters. On average we will be adding 60 beds to families with children sites and 108 beds to single sites. This will shrink the number of places homeless people are housed by about 50%, vastly reducing the sprawl of shelter facilities throughout the city.

There are currently about 270 buildings with cluster apartments in them. There are 10,000 people in about 3,000 cluster apartments in these buildings. There are approximately 80 hotels being used as shelter facilities. Around 7,500 New Yorkers occupy rooms in these hotels. The total number of New Yorkers in all of these facilities is almost a third of the people in DHS shelters.

## **Creating New, Effective Shelters**

Today, the experience of staying in a shelter is all too often a barrier to reestablishing a stable life and finding a path back to more permanent housing. Families are moved from the places they know to locations far away from their old lives. They have a place to stay, but may be unable to keep up with jobs or school attendance or visits to doctors. In short, a roof and a bed are not enough. We need shelters that can actually

help people maintain stability and find their way back to the lives they had before homelessness.

The City will open approximately 20 new shelters annually for the next five years to get to the goal of opening approximately 90 new shelters. With our new shelters, residents will not have to move far away from a job, a school, a grandmother, house of worship, a friend or a medical clinic that has been part of the resident's life.

In addition, we will expand shelters capacity in existing buildings. Renovation of the first sites will begin in 2018 and take place on a rolling basis over the next seven years. The City will open 12 temporary locations for them.

All of the new shelters we open will be funded to provide a wide range of services. Residents will have access to social services and mental health counseling when needed. They will also get education and career training to help get back on their feet and off of the street. The shelters will be clean, well maintained and the NYPD will oversee security.

Every shelter client deserves high-quality shelter and services to help them get back on their feet, so it is imperative that not only new shelters stand-up to the City's higher standards, but that our existing shelters do so too. The City will be allocating significant resources to improve the existing shelters. Over time facilities will be assessed and updated to provide clean, safe, livable environments, redesigned to provide areas for targeted programing and spaces that engage the surrounding community, and maximize the City's investment.

## **Turning the Tide Together, Neighborhood by Neighborhood**

**The City will hold up its end of bargain, every neighborhood has a stake and a role to play, and a call to action.**

Every neighborhood has a stake and an interest in taking on this crisis. For too long, the City has not held up its end of the bargain when it comes to homelessness. That must change for our vision to become reality.

As we shrink the footprint of shelters citywide, we will reform how we notify neighborhoods about plans to open our smaller number of new shelters. We will implement protocols to notify community leaders at least 30 days in advance and invite community input when a new shelter is proposed in their neighborhood. The City is committing to meaningful community engagement, a clear shelter opening notification framework for every shelter, and a more equitable distribution of shelters citywide over time.

In turn, the City needs the help of community leaders to find locations for new shelters that are best for neighborhoods and for the lives of homeless families.

This is how we will make steady progress. We must accept the hard truth that we will not end this problem overnight. It will take smart, sustained and coordinated effort. It will take years and the assistance of many New Yorkers. This plan represents a promise that, for the first time in decades, the City will do its part to solve this problem. But success can only happen when the City works in partnership with every community. By working together -- neighborhood by neighborhood-- we can turn the tide.

# Turning the Tide on Homelessness

in New York City

Chapter 1

# 20 Years of Rising Homelessness



## Overview

Homelessness has been growing in New York City for decades. Over the past 20 years, the average monthly census of Department of Homeless Services (DHS) shelters increased 115 percent—rising from 23,868 men, women, and children in January 1994, to 31,009 in January 2002, before reaching 51,470 in January 2014. Between April 2011 (when the Advantage rental assistance program ended) and January 2014, some 14,000 additional people were in DHS shelters, an increase of 38 percent in less than three years.

Had the de Blasio administration not stopped this trajectory, the DHS shelter census would have likely reached nearly 70,000 in December 2016, rather than 60,000. As this plan attests, this administration has stemmed the tide of homeless shelter census growth in New York City. With this new plan, the administration will ultimately reduce the shelter population by 2,500 people over five years.

## Factors Driving Homelessness in New York City

The primary forces driving New York City's homelessness problem are similar to those in other urban areas of the U.S.: poverty and a lack of affordable housing.<sup>1</sup> But the scale of the problem New York City now faces is unique in its intensity and scope.

### A Growing Affordability Crisis

New York City has some 3.4 million units<sup>2</sup> of housing. However, most of those units are unaffordable for many low- and middle-income New York families and individuals.

This problem is exacerbated by the fact that renters make up a much higher percentage of residents in New York City than elsewhere in the U.S.<sup>3</sup> As the availability of affordable rental housing has failed to keep pace with the need for it, the city's housing affordability problem has worsened over time.



A family that recently left a DHS shelter run by Henry Street Settlement for a home in the community.

<sup>1</sup> For a recent study of the root causes of homelessness, see Byrne, T., et al. "New Perspectives on Community-Level Determinants of Homelessness." *Journal of Urban Affairs* 35:5 (2013): 607-625. Among the conclusions of the study is that, for adults in metropolitan areas living in poverty, a \$100 increase in median rent was associated with a 15 percent increase in homelessness. The association between other housing and economic factors and homelessness is also discussed.

<sup>2</sup> Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2014 New York City Housing and Vacancy Survey.

<sup>3</sup> The New York City Rent Guidelines Board, working from Census data, calculates that rental units make up 64 percent of the city's available housing stock, 76 percent more than the proportion of rental units in the nation as a whole (2016 Housing Supply Report. Retrieved from [http://nycrgb.org/downloads/research/pdf\\_reports/16HSR.pdf](http://nycrgb.org/downloads/research/pdf_reports/16HSR.pdf)).





Between 2005 and 2015

rents up

**18.3%**

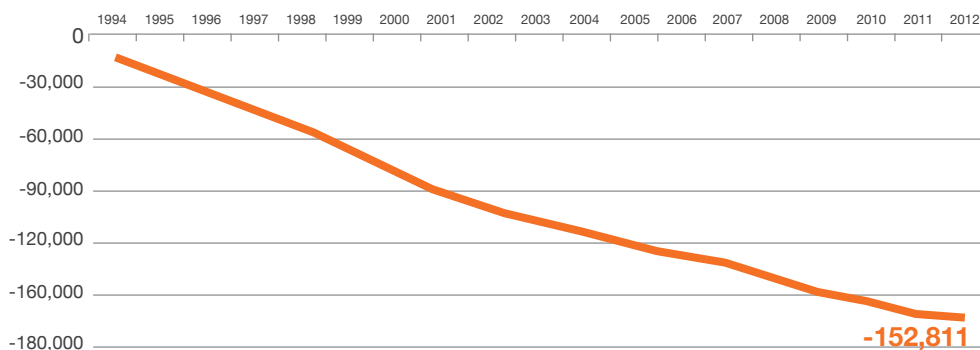
while incomes increase  
by only

**4.8%**

This statistic emphasizes the severity of the problem: Between 2005 and 2015, the median New York City household income increased by just 4.8 percent in real dollars, while the median rent increased by 18.3 percent in real dollars.<sup>4</sup>

Meanwhile, data from the Rent Guidelines Board reveals that between 1994 and 2012 almost 250,000 apartments lost the protections of rent regulation. While some units have been added as a condition for tax incentives and other subsidies that building owners received, there has been a huge net loss of rent-regulated units. Indeed, over those 18 years, the city suffered a net loss of about 150,000 rent-stabilized units, or 16 percent of the total rent-regulated stock.<sup>5</sup>

Net Loss of Rent-Stabilized Units, 1994–2012



Source: Rent Guidelines Board. (2013) *Changes to the Rent Stabilized Housing Stock in New York City in 2012*. As found in *Housing New York*, page 23.



Homebase client Diane (left) and CAMBA Homebase Program Director Carlene Campbell. Diane was on the brink of losing her apartment when she was pointed in the direction of CAMBA's Homebase team, who helped her stay in her apartment.

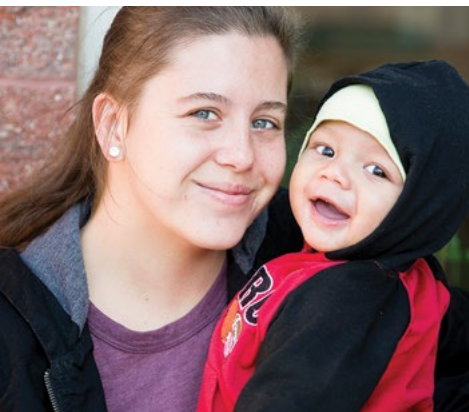
<sup>4</sup> Source: 2005 and 2015 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates, table S2503 and B25064. All income and rent figures adjusted to 2015 dollars using New York-Northern New Jersey-Long Island, NY-NJ-CT-PA Area Consumer Price Index—All Urban Consumers. Note that a December 2016 analysis by the City's Independent Budget Office found that this general trend is continuing, with wages declining 11 percent since 2007, after adjusting for inflation. New York City Independent Budget Office. (2016.) *A Forecast in Uncertain Times: Only Modest Budget Shortfalls Ahead Despite a Slowdown in Local Economic Growth*. Retrieved from <http://www.ibo.nyc.ny.us/iboreports/a-forecast-in-uncertain-times-only-modest-budget-shortfalls-ahead-despite-a-slowdown-in-local-economic-growth.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> As noted in *Housing New York: A Five-Borough, Ten-Year Plan*, pages 104–105, the Rent Guidelines Board estimates a minimum number of units lost based on the State's Division of Housing and Community Renewal (DHCR) registration data for stabilized units. They also provide an actual number of stabilized units added based on data collected from various City and State agencies. Calculations for the net number of units lost are based on the total rent-stabilized stock as estimated by the U.S. Census Bureau for the 1993 Housing and Vacancy Survey. Net Loss of Rent-Stabilized Units is defined as Cumulative Additions to the stock subtracted from Cumulative Loss to the stock. Cumulative additions to the stock include units that become subject to rent stabilization due to receipt of 421-a, 421-g, 420-c, or J-51 benefits; or Lofts. Cumulative Loss includes units subtracted from the stock from High Rent/High Income Deregulation, High Rent/Vacancy Deregulation, Co-op/ Condo Conversion, 421-a and J-51 Expiration, Substantial Rehab, Commercial/Professional Conversion, and Other.



**For 1 million families including 3 million people**

**only 500,000 apartments are affordable**



**Mother and child outside a shelter run by HELP USA.**

Combined, these trends have resulted in the current housing affordability crisis. In 2015, there were about one million Extremely Low Income and Very Low Income households—defined as households earning less than 50 percent of the Area Median Income for New York City<sup>6</sup>—but there were only a little more than 500,000 rental units affordable to those households.<sup>7</sup> In other words, the city has only half the housing it needs for about three million low-income New Yorkers.

New Yorkers who can only afford apartments at this rent level thus have few places to turn. While the city’s overall rental vacancy rate of 3.5 percent poses problems for people of all incomes, renters only able to afford an apartment costing \$800 or less must search in a market with a vacancy rate of just 1.8 percent.<sup>8</sup>

In 2016, a family of three with a household income of \$24,500 (equivalent to 30 percent of the Income Limit for the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) for 2016) could afford to pay approximately \$613 per month in rent and utilities—a figure well under half of the city’s 2015 median gross rent of \$1,317.<sup>9</sup>

Even so, New Yorkers sacrifice a great deal to stay in their homes and maintain their connections to their communities.

A general rule of thumb for affordability is that a rental unit is considered affordable if a household pays less than 30 percent of its gross annual income on rent and utilities. A household paying more than 30 percent of its income on rent is considered rent-burdened; households that pay more than 50 percent of their income on rent are considered to be severely rent-burdened. In 2014, more than half of all rental households in New York City were rent-burdened and about 3 out of every 10 of the city’s renters were severely rent-burdened.<sup>10</sup>

The result is that 35 percent of households earning up to 50 percent of the Area Median Income—some 360,000 households—are severely rent-burdened. Another 140,000 households are moderately rent-burdened, for a total of a half a million New York City households still paying an unaffordable amount of their income for housing.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>6</sup> For additional information on the Area Median Income in New York City, see “Affordable Housing: Building a Fairer Future,” page 40.

<sup>7</sup> This analysis updates one performed for *Housing New York* (pages 18–19). Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2014 New York City Housing and Vacancy Survey (HVS). Note that these roughly half a million units of affordable housing include the housing maintained by the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA), which has about 259,000 families on the waiting list for conventional public housing and about 147,000 applicants on a list for Section 8 housing that has been closed for more than nine years. See “Facts about NYCHA.” New York City Housing Authority (April 11, 2016). Retrieved from <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/nycha/downloads/pdf/factsheet.pdf>.

<sup>8</sup> Gaumer, E. and West, S. (2015.) *Selected Initial Findings of the 2014 New York City Housing and Vacancy Survey*. NYC Department of Housing and Preservation Development. Retrieved from <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/hpd/downloads/pdf/2014-HVS-initial-Findings.pdf>.

<sup>9</sup> Source: American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates, table B25064.

<sup>10</sup> This analysis updates one performed for *Housing New York* (page 17). Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2014 New York City Housing and Vacancy Survey.

<sup>11</sup> *Housing New York*, page 18.



**Supply and Demand among Extremely Low Income and Very Low Income Renter Households**

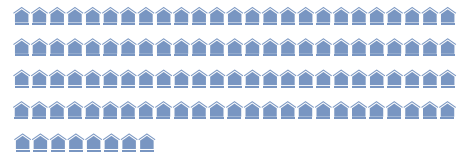
**1,003,434 Households**

Extremely Low Income and Very Low Income Households



**540,213 Units**

Rental Units Affordable to Extremely Low Income and Very Low Income Households



= 5,000 Households

= 5,000 Units

Based on an analysis performed for *Housing New York* (pages 18–19). Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2014 New York City Housing and Vacancy Survey (HVS).

**Rent Burden**



56 percent of renters are rent-burdened and three in 10 households are severely rent-burdened, paying half or more of their income to rent and utilities



= severely rent-burdened household



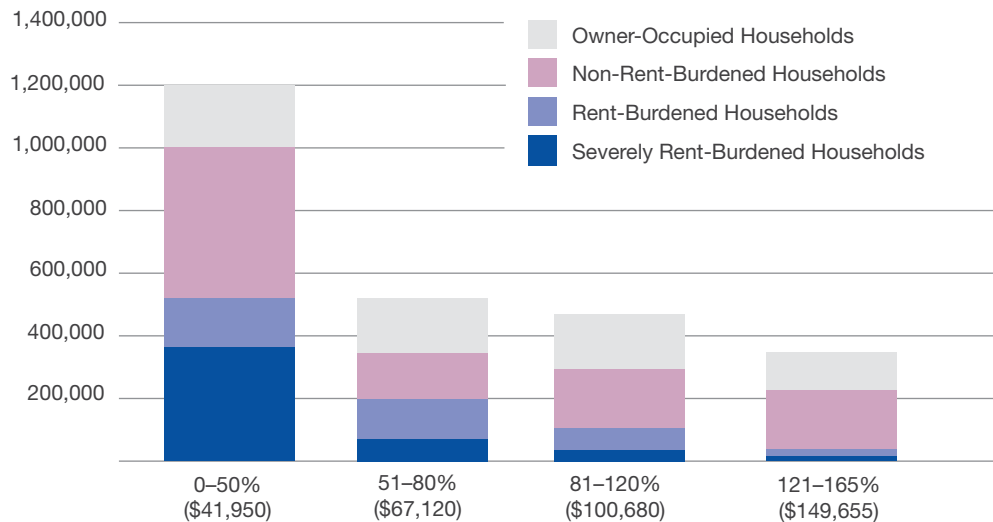
= rent-burdened household



= not rent-burdened household

Based on an analysis performed for *Housing New York* (page 17). Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2014 New York City Housing and Vacancy Survey (HVS).

**Number of Rent-Burdened Households by Income Band**



Source: *Housing New York*, page 20.



A father and his child at the 2016 Dads Matter Awards held at the Manhattan headquarters of DHS.

## Income Volatility and Little Savings

Many people who are rent-burdened or severely rent-burdened cycle in and out of poverty, living just one personal crisis away from homelessness.

A survey by the Pew Charitable Trusts found that in any given two-year period, nearly half of all U.S. households experienced significant income volatility—gaining or losing at least 25 percent of their income.<sup>12</sup>

Such uncertain finances leave little room for a safety net. The Federal Reserve’s *Report on the Economic Well-Being of U.S. Households* found that in 2015 almost 20 percent of families in the United States faced a financial crisis such as a medical emergency, a divorce, or the loss of a job or a reduction in work hours. Nearly half of all families lack the resources to handle such a crisis.<sup>13</sup>

New Yorkers are no different from the rest of the country in this regard. An ongoing longitudinal study suggests that nearly half of all New Yorkers lived in poverty at some point over the three-year period studied (2012–2014).<sup>14</sup> A separate report by the Urban Institute found that more than half of all New Yorkers and two-thirds of Bronx residents felt financially insecure and reported not having enough money on hand to cover three months of expenses.<sup>15</sup>

## Overcrowding

A common result of high rents and low incomes is that more people pool their resources by crowding into a single apartment. A 2015 analysis of the New York City Housing Vacancy Survey found that in 2014 more than one out of 10 rental units in the city were crowded (defined as more than one person per room) and approximately one in 20 were severely crowded (with 1.5 people per room). Between 2011 and 2014, both crowding and severe crowding worsened somewhat for virtually every type of rental unit in the city.<sup>16</sup>

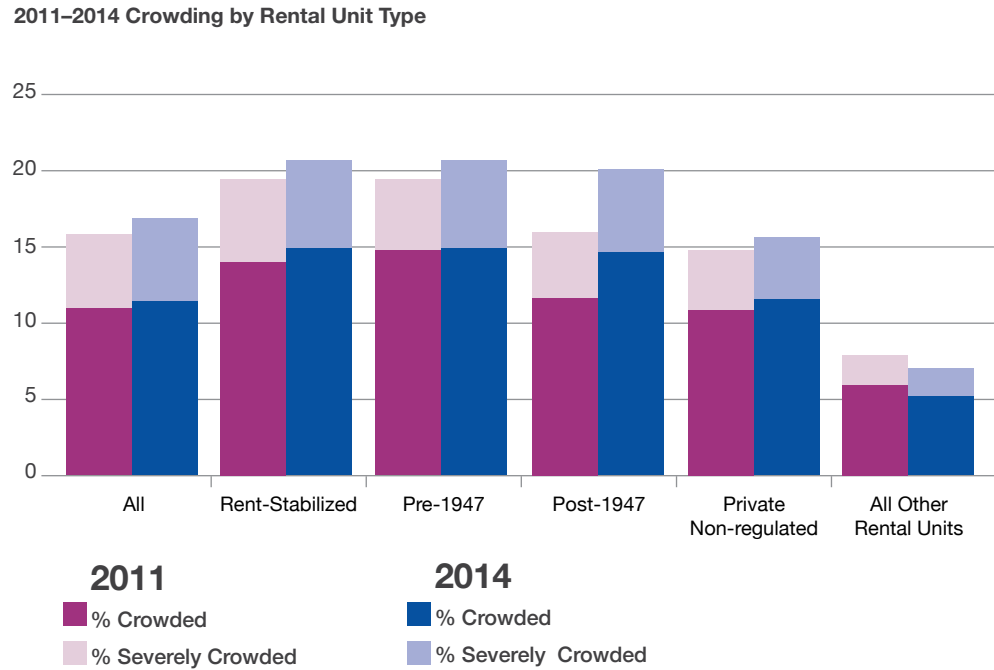
<sup>12</sup> Pew Charitable Trusts. (2015.) *The Precarious State of Family Balance Sheets*. Retrieved from [http://www.pewtrusts.org/~media/assets/2015/01/fsm\\_balance\\_sheet\\_report.pdf](http://www.pewtrusts.org/~media/assets/2015/01/fsm_balance_sheet_report.pdf).

<sup>13</sup> Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System. (2015.) *Report on the Economic Well-Being of U.S. Households in 2015*. Retrieved from <https://www.federalreserve.gov/2015-report-economic-well-being-us-households-201605.pdf>.

<sup>14</sup> Wimer, C., et al. (2016.) *The Persistence of Poverty in New York City: A Three-Year Perspective from the Poverty Tracker*. Retrieved from [http://povertytracker.robinhood.org/download/poverty\\_tracker\\_fall\\_2016.pdf](http://povertytracker.robinhood.org/download/poverty_tracker_fall_2016.pdf). Note that these figures take into account the high cost of living in New York City by using the Census Bureau’s Supplemental Poverty Measure.

<sup>15</sup> Ratcliffe, C., et al. (2015.) *How Do New Yorkers Perceive Their Financial Security?* Urban Institute. Retrieved from <http://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/71506/2000429-How-Do-New-Yorkers-Perceive-Their-Financial-Security.pdf>.

<sup>16</sup> Source: Gaumer, E., and West, S. (2015.) *Selected Initial Findings of the 2014 New York City Housing and Vacancy Survey*. New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development. Table 19. Retrieved from <http://www1.nyc.gov/assets/hpd/downloads/pdf/2014-HVS-initial-Findings.pdf>.



Source: Gaumer, E., and West, S. (2015.) *Selected Initial Findings of the 2014 New York City Housing and Vacancy Survey*. New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development. Table 19.

Like housing affordability, overcrowding is considered a significant risk factor for homelessness. A 2005 Vera Institute of Justice report found that overcrowding was the most common reason for homelessness in New York City over the four-year period studied.<sup>17</sup> Data for 2016 suggests it remains an important factor, with 17 percent of the families with children entering shelters each month becoming homeless due to overcrowding.<sup>18</sup>

### Domestic Violence

Domestic violence is consistently one of the top reasons people enter New York City shelters. In 2016, among families with children entering DHS shelters each month, an average of 31 percent had a history of domestic violence, including 10 percent who were eligible for HRA’s No Violence Again (NoVA) program due to an ongoing domestic violence threat.<sup>19</sup>

To better meet these urgent needs, the City is moving forward with a new initiative to provide an additional 300 emergency beds for domestic violence survivors, as well as 400 new apartment-style facilities (known as Tier II units) with a cooking space and bathroom for each family. The first 150 emergency beds have already been

<sup>17</sup> Smith, N., et al. (2005.) *Understanding Family Homelessness in New York City: An In-Depth Study of Families’ Experiences Before and After Shelter*. Retrieved from [http://archive.vera.org/sites/default/files/resources/downloads/Understanding\\_family\\_homelessness.pdf](http://archive.vera.org/sites/default/files/resources/downloads/Understanding_family_homelessness.pdf).

<sup>18</sup> Source: Department of Social Services.

<sup>19</sup> Source: Department of Social Services.



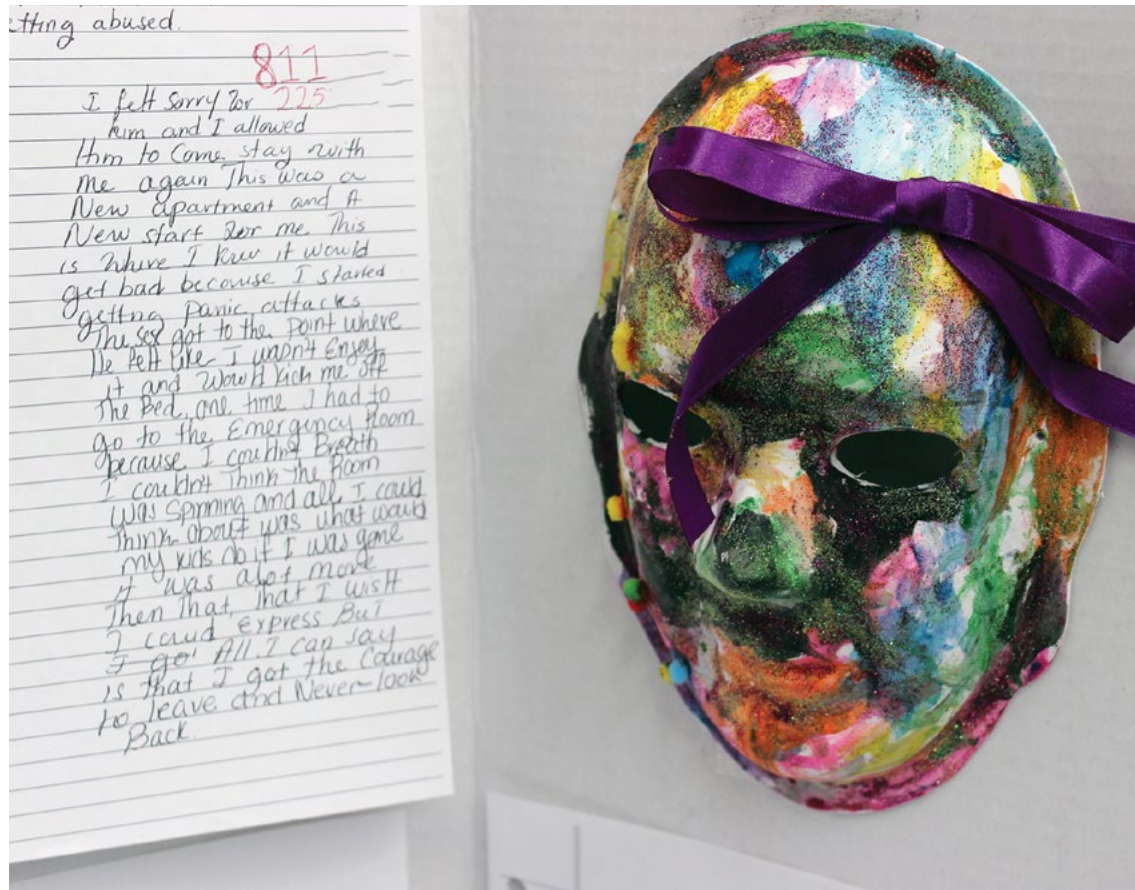


Mayor de Blasio is joined by Dr. Herminia Palacio, Deputy Mayor of Health Human Services; Steven Banks, Commissioner of the Department of Social Services; and Cecile Noel, Commissioner of the Mayor's Office to Combat Domestic Violence, for a roundtable with advocates and survivors of domestic violence.



made available. With this 50 percent increase over existing domestic violence shelter capacity—the first increase of any kind since 2010—the City can serve a total of about 13,300 children and adults a year.

A testimonial and art displayed at an event to mark National Domestic Violence Month at a domestic violence shelter run by Henry Street Settlement.





## Street Homelessness

While most of New York City's homeless population consists of families with children in homeless shelters, the most visible people are those who have fallen through every safety net and now live on the street.

The solution is not to arrest people as it is not a crime to be homeless. But we also cannot ignore the problem.

What is needed are sufficient community behavioral health resources, more supportive housing, and a comprehensive approach to homelessness prevention to better assist New Yorkers on the streets so they can transition to permanent housing and return to a life of self-sufficiency.

As described later in this plan, the City is implementing its new HOME-STAT program to better identify and provide services to street homeless individuals to bring them in from the streets. To meet these goals, the City has doubled the number of outreach workers, initiated daily street canvassing in the areas of the city that generate the most 311 calls about street homelessness, and added quarterly counts of the street homeless population to the annual count conducted in line with the mandates of HUD.

Last year, HOME-STAT brought 690 people living on the street into transitional programs or permanent housing and built a by-name list that now has a total of 1,300 people still on the streets with whom outreach workers engage regularly to offer services.



**William, who moved from the streets to a supportive housing facility through the work of Breaking Ground, a HOME-STAT service provider.**



## Who Are New York City's Homeless?

By the end of calendar 2016, there were about 60,000 men, women, and children in DHS shelters at any one time.

About two-thirds of the people served are families with children.

Children under the age of 18 accounted for more than a third of the shelter population as a whole, and more than half of the people served in shelters for families with children. There were more than 10,000 children five years old or younger.

Seniors age 65 and older constituted two percent of the shelter population.

Single adults are the next largest group of New Yorkers in shelters. They comprised about 30 percent of unique individuals in shelters in fiscal year 2016. The majority of single adults in shelters in 2016 were between the ages of 45 and 64.

A substantial number of people in shelters are working adults who cannot afford to rent an apartment given their incomes. Among families with children in shelter, more than one-third include a family member who is employed. Among adult families without minor children, this figure is more than 20 percent. About 15 percent of single adults in shelter are employed.

Contrary to some public belief, people from outside New York City are not a factor in the growth of the homeless shelter census. Even among the people in shelter with a recent address outside the city, almost all of them are returning to New York after trying to build a life somewhere else. For example, in the first half of 2016, out of the total of 7,329 families who applied for shelter, only 126 families did not have an easily identified prior address in New York City.



# 1/3

of families with children in shelter have a working family member

Assemblywoman Latoya Joyner joins a group of children from Samaritan Daytop Village's Bridge Haven Family Transitional Residence in the Bronx for the opening of its new Literacy Corner.







**Gender for Shelter Head of Case**

Adult Families



**38%**  
**62%**

Singe Adults



**72%**  
**28%**

Families with Children



**9%**  
**91%**

= Male = Female

Source: Department of Social Services.  
Data as of December 2, 2016.

**Profile of Shelter Population**

Case Type	% of All Individuals in Shelter
Families with Children	63%
Adult Families	7%
Single Adults	29%

Subpopulation Type	% of All Individuals in Shelter
Children 0–17	36%
65 or older	2%

Source: Department of Social Services.  
Data for unique clients in shelter during fiscal year 2016.

**Age Distribution of Families with Children in Shelter**

Age	% of Families with Children
0–5	25%
6–13	24%
14–17	8%
18–20	4%
21–29	18%
30–44	17%
45–64	5%
65 or older	0.2%

Source: Department of Social Services.  
Data for unique clients in shelter subpopulation during fiscal year 2016.

**Age Distribution of Adult Families in Shelter**

Age	% of Adult Families
18–20	11%
21–29	27%
30–44	24%
45–64	36%
65 or older	3%

Source: Department of Social Services.  
Data for unique clients in shelter subpopulation during fiscal year 2016.

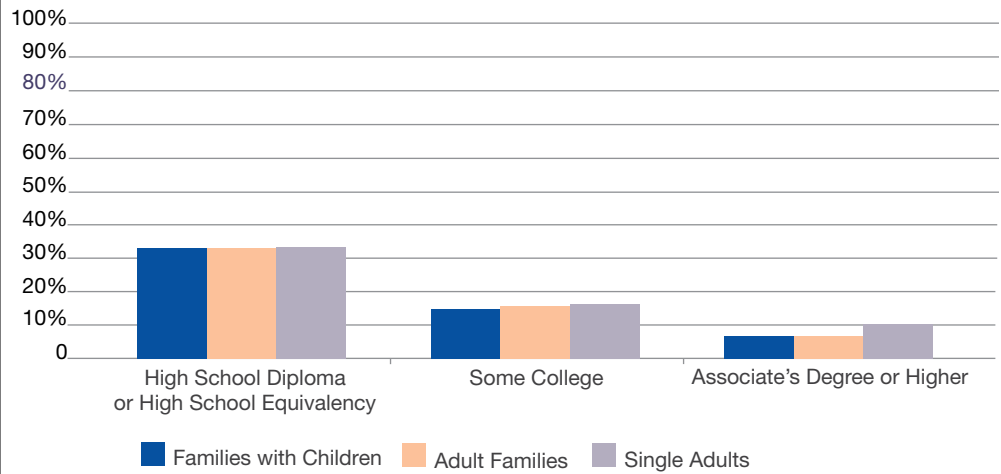


**Age Distribution of Single Adults in Shelter**

Age	% of Single Adults
18–29	19%
30–44	31%
45–64	45%
65 or older	6%

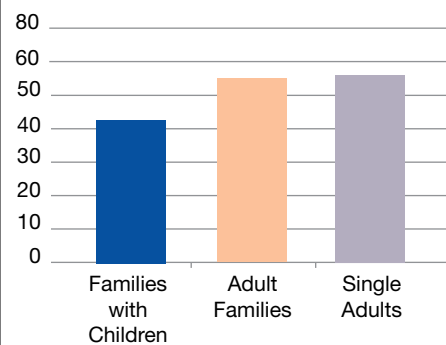
Source: Department of Social Services.  
Data for unique clients in shelter subpopulation during fiscal year 2016.

**Education Level of Shelter Head of Case**



Source: Department of Social Services. Data as of December 2, 2016.

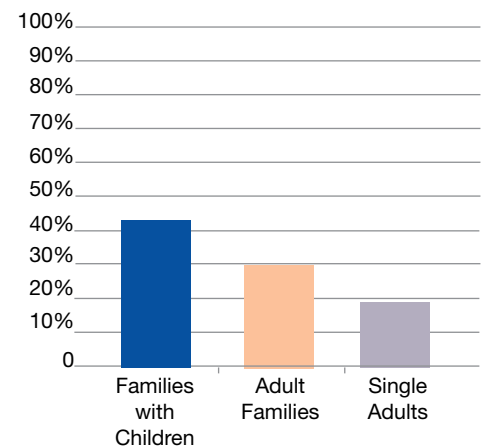
**Average Age for Shelter Head of Case**



Source: Department of Social Services.  
Data as of December 2, 2016.

**Current Employment Rate of Shelter Residents**

As a percentage of the total number of people in shelter for that subpopulation.



Source: Department of Social Services.  
Data as of December 2, 2016.



### Per Capita Rate of Unsheltered Homeless Population in Major U.S. Cities

Among the top 8 U.S. cities in population, plus Washington, D.C. and Boston

City	Ratio*
Los Angeles	1 in 285
San Diego	1 in 668
San Antonio	1 in 1,606
Washington, D.C.	1 in 2,114
Chicago	1 in 2,189
Philadelphia	1 in 2,223
Phoenix	1 in 2,532
<b>New York</b>	<b>1 in 3,013</b>
Boston	1 in 3,995
Houston	1 in 4,393

\* Ratio of the estimated number of street homeless individuals to each city's total population

Data Sources: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. (2016.) *The 2016 Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress, part 1*. American Community Survey 2015 5-Year Population Averages.

## The National Context for New York City's Homelessness

The same economic trends that have made homelessness a serious problem in New York City have created similar problems in other U.S. cities. This is particularly true of Los Angeles, which has seen its homeless population increase by 32 percent between 2010 and 2016. In that same timeframe, New York City's homeless population increased by 39 percent, with most of that growth occurring between 2011 and 2014—the period between the end of the Advantage rental assistance program and the start of this administration's new rental assistance, rehousing, and prevention programs.<sup>20</sup>

Yet the change in Los Angeles is also markedly different, as it is driven primarily by growth in the unsheltered homeless population. In New York City, by contrast, the growth comes primarily in its shelters because, unlike most in major U.S. cities, in New York City the right to shelter is legally mandated.<sup>21</sup> Where other cities provide shelter based on capacity, New York provides it based on need.

The impact of this commitment to providing shelter is shown in the rates of street homelessness in other major cities. According to HUD, one out of every 3,013 New Yorkers is identified as being homeless and unsheltered. In Los Angeles, the rate is one out of every 285. Almost 75 percent of the homeless population in Los Angeles—approaching some 33,000 individuals—lives outside of a shelter. In New York, that same rate is under 4 percent, or a little more than 2,800 individuals.<sup>22</sup>

Consistent with its legal requirement, the City's right-to-shelter mandate thus plays a central role in shaping our response to our current problem, serving as a testament to how firmly the City is committed to helping its residents in times of great need.

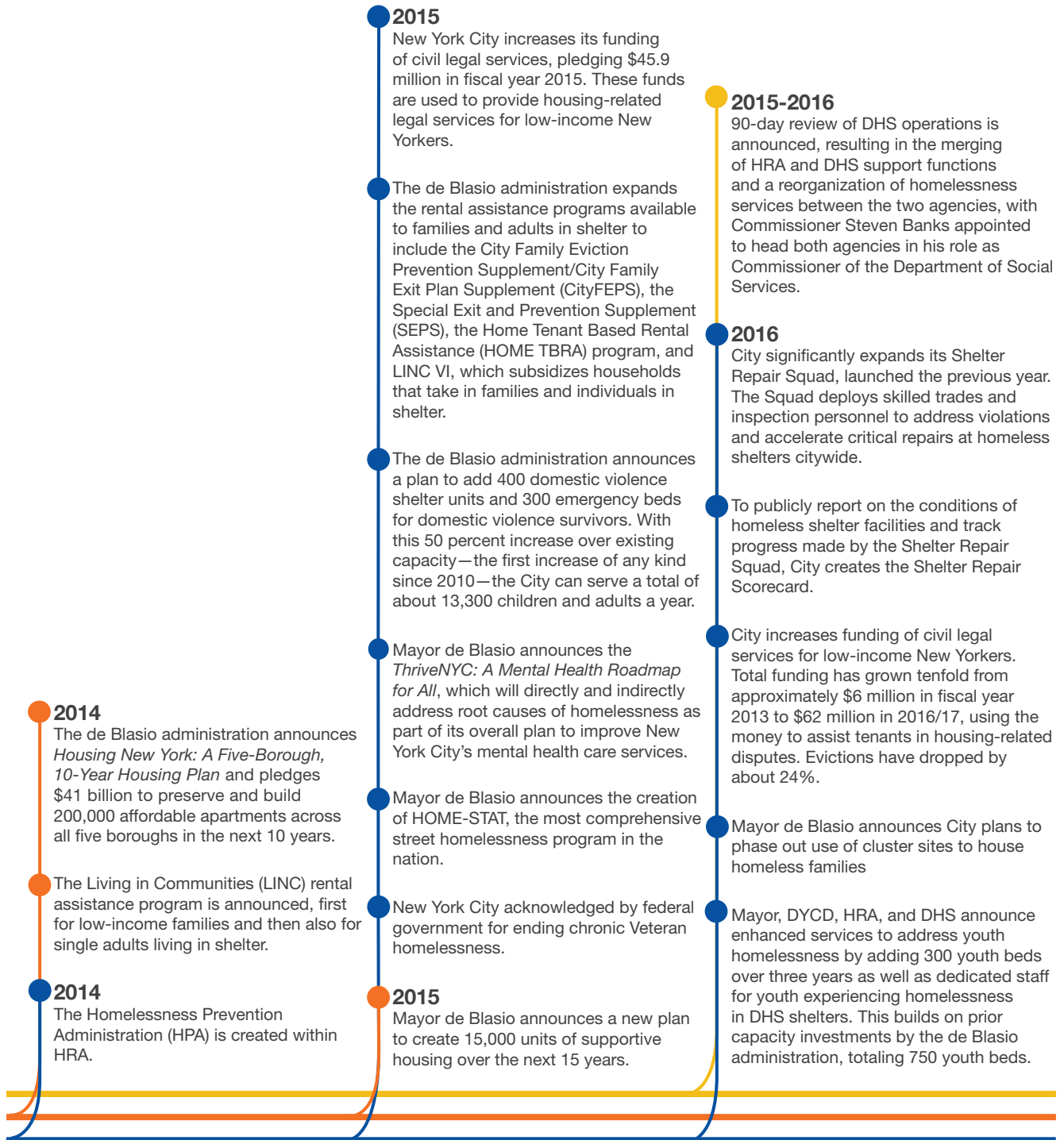
<sup>20</sup> Source: HUD 2007-2016 Point-in-Time Estimates by Continuum of Care. Table 2. Point-in-Time Count of Unsheltered Homeless People.

<sup>21</sup> Corinth, K.C. (2015.) *Street Homelessness: A Disappearing Act?* American Enterprise Institute. <https://www.aei.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Street-homelessness.pdf>.

<sup>22</sup> HUD, American Community Survey 2015 5-Year Population Averages. *The 2016 Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress, part 1*. Retrieved from <https://www.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/2016-AHAR-Part-1.pdf>.



## Milestones in the Fight against Homelessness in New York City, 2014—Present



Administrative/Regulatory  
Housing Resources  
Programs/Services



## Angel

BROOKLYN

**Housing:** Shelter with program designed for parolees

**Help Provided:** Job training

### Client's Story

Angel was incarcerated for two years before he joined the Doe Fund's Ready, Willing & Able transitional work program. Before then, his life had followed a pattern all too familiar in his home neighborhood: poverty, drugs, foster care, violence, and incarceration.

"The only memory I have of my father is when he walked out on us. That's when things got really bad at home."

After Angel's mother was arrested for selling drugs, he was placed in several foster homes. "Any chance I got, I hit the streets to escape. I robbed. I sold drugs just like my mom. I got shot three times before I finally got arrested."

When Angel was released from prison and homeless, his parole officer recommended a homeless shelter where the Doe Fund operates Ready, Willing & Able as a way to take his life in a different, better direction.

The first few months in the program were difficult, but Angel persevered. "I signed up for the Doe Fund's culinary program. I had no idea that I love baking, but it turns out that I'm a natural!"

His days of running in the streets now feel like distant memories. "I've done something good with my life. I've got a career in the kitchen and my own apartment. I'm a mentor to other young men just joining the program. Most important, I'm a working man and I'm *never* going back to prison."





Angel

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Chapter 2

# Homelessness Prevention



## Overview

Prevention has been a central component of the City’s successful first phase of initiatives to stem the rising tide that led to the addition of 14,000 people to the shelter census—a 38 percent increase in less than three years—following the end of the Advantage program in 2011. Prevention will be equally central to the next phase of initiatives in this plan to begin to reduce the shelter census each year. In the April 2016 report on the Mayor’s 90-day review of homeless services<sup>1</sup> the City recommitted to a prevention-first strategy. In 2017, the City will make new investments in the prevention initiatives developed over the past three years—initiatives that have already made it possible for tens of thousands of New Yorkers to keep their homes.

## Key Accomplishments: Helping New Yorkers Stay in Their Communities

No other city in the U.S. employs such a broad and sophisticated array of homelessness prevention tools as New York City. The rapid, strategic improvement of these tools under the de Blasio administration has already led to measurably better outcomes for tens of thousands of New Yorkers who would otherwise have been forced out of their homes and into a shelter.

Some of the most important enhancements this administration has already made include:

- Making an unprecedented tenfold increased investment in tenant legal services programs for low-income New Yorkers. Evictions are now down 24 percent, allowing a combined total of 40,000 people over the course of 2015 and 2016 to keep their homes.
- Providing a greater amount of emergency rental assistance so that rent-burdened New Yorkers at risk of eviction can stay in their homes. In the first three years of the administration, 161,000 households received this help.
- Expanding the City’s nationally recognized Homebase program so that more New Yorkers can maintain housing in their community.
- Developing the Tenant Support Unit, which in the 18 months since its launch has reached more than 194,000 New Yorkers through its proactive outreach on critical services to prevent homelessness among renters facing housing-related problems.
- Creating a new Homelessness Prevention Administration (HPA) within the Human Resources Administration (HRA) that brings homelessness prevention,



Evictions are down  
24%, allowing

**40,000**

people to keep their homes

<sup>1</sup> *Review of Homeless Service Agencies and Programs*. (2016.) Retrieved from <http://www1.nyc.gov/assets/home/downloads/pdf/reports/2016/90-day-homeless-services-review.pdf>.





rental assistance, and early intervention all under one roof to improve program management and effectiveness.

## The Road Ahead—Strengthening Prevention First

Preventing homelessness before it occurs is critical to meeting the overarching goal of this plan: reducing the number of families and individuals living in shelter. It is also a cost-effective commonsense response to New York’s homelessness problem. The City’s 2017 investments are focused in three areas with a proven track record of keeping New Yorkers in their homes:

- **Preventive rental assistance** for low-income tenants at risk of eviction for past-due rent who can show they are able to pay their rent going forward.
- **Free legal assistance** for low-income tenants facing eviction, landlord harassment, and other housing-related legal problems.
- **Homebase**, New York City’s service-rich, community-based program that has become a national model for keeping families from losing their housing.

### Rental Assistance: Securing Permanent Housing

In 2017, the City will:

- Streamline its vital rental assistance programs (described in the next chapter) to improve their effectiveness and efficiency.
- Expand these rental assistance programs to include, for the first time, youth living in Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) youth shelters at risk of entering Department of Homeless Services (DHS) shelters.
- Continue to offer, and look for ways to expand, support to families who house family members with them as an alternative to entering shelter.
- Strengthen the City’s efforts to prosecute landlords who illegally refuse to take rental assistance vouchers.

### Legal Services: Preventing Evictions

Building on its already unprecedented commitment of \$62 million per year in free legal assistance, the City will be phasing in an additional \$93 million over the next five years to provide universal access to free legal services for tenants facing eviction, landlord harassment, and other housing-related legal issues.

Starting with an additional \$15 million allocation in fiscal year 2018, these expanded legal services will, when fully ramped up by 2022:

- Provide an extraordinary \$155 million in services to curb unlawful evictions and prevent the displacement of families and individuals—a funding increase of approximately 25 times the amount provided in 2013.



Staff from the City’s Public Engagement Unit performing outreach in the community.

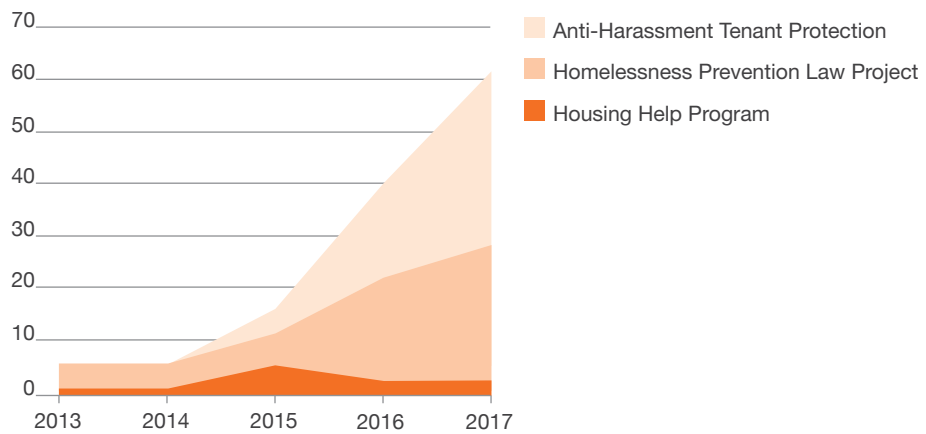


- Serve an estimated 400,000 New Yorkers every year by providing universal access to legal assistance for all tenants facing eviction. Households with incomes below 200 percent of the federal poverty level (roughly \$50,000 for a family of four) will receive full representation, while those earning more will receive legal advice and assistance.
- Continue to actively pursue cases in communities around the city where tenants are most at risk of harassment, and disseminate information in these communities about available legal services.

In the near term, the City will, by the end of 2017, enhance procedures at Housing Court to ensure tenants in need are connected to legal services.

### New York City Funding for Tenant Legal Services, Fiscal Years 2013–2017

in Millions



Source: Department of Social Services.

## Homebase: Expanding Community-Based Prevention Services

Homebase, the City's community-based homelessness prevention program, will be expanded to serve more New Yorkers at risk of homelessness. Additional funding will enhance existing services in four critical areas:

### Preventing shelter entry

In Staten Island in early 2017, HRA will begin piloting an enhanced shelter-prevention model intended to avert the need for Staten Island families to travel to DHS's Prevention Assistance and Temporary Housing (PATH) intake center in the Bronx. As part of the effort, Homebase will offer flexible financial assistance and enhanced mediation services to prevent families from having to enter a shelter.

### Expanding Homebase providers

By mid-2017, HRA will expand the number of Homebase providers from 11 to 16 to



deliver even more closely targeted services. This change will also make it easier for clients, advocates, caseworkers, and landlords to identify the Homebase program that’s right for them.

**Enhancing use of data analytics**

By combining data from many sources, the City will improve its ability to accurately assess the risk factors that lead to homelessness and then reach out to families at risk to provide help to prevent it.

**Expanding onsite benefits**

By mid-2017, HRA staff at Homebase offices will provide expanded onsite processing and triage for public assistance and rental assistance. Homebase nonprofit staff will also expand their services to include landlord and family mediation, educational advancement, employment, and financial literacy services.

**Current Services**

The City formalized its prevention-first approach to homelessness in the April 2016 report on the results of Mayor de Blasio’s comprehensive operational review of New York City’s homeless programs. Building on the success of these services over the past three years, the changes coming to the City’s homelessness prevention efforts will help pave the way for reductions in the shelter census in the years to come.

**Providing Targeted Rental Assistance to Let New Yorkers Stay in Their Communities**

Beginning in 2014, as part of the first phase of the administration’s initiatives to stem the exponential increases in homelessness that began after the end of Advantage in 2011, the City significantly increased its investments in HRA’s existing Emergency Rent Assistance program while also building a preventive capacity into two newly developed rental assistance programs. Having already helped tens of thousands of New Yorkers

An outreach brochure puts help in people’s hands with a map of Homebase offices in their borough and a list of free services.

Far right: Dr. Herminia Palacio, Deputy Mayor of Health and Human Services, speaking with a community member at Homebase Day of Action. Conducted in partnership with the City’s Public Engagement Unit and the Department of Education, the Day of Action brought together elected officials and service providers to offer homelessness prevention resources at local public schools across the city.





**Emergency Rent Assistance vs. Annual Family Shelter Costs**

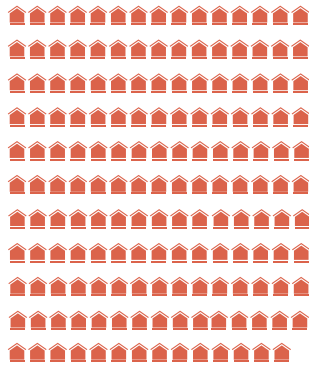
**\$3,400**

Average rent arrears payment made through HRA's Emergency Rent Assistance program



**\$41,000**

Average annual cost of housing a family in a shelter



🏠 = \$250

Source: Department of Social Services.

stave off eviction and stay in their communities, these three programs will now play an important role in the City's plan to begin to reduce the shelter census.

**Emergency Rent Assistance**

New Yorkers who face a temporary problem paying rent but can demonstrate the capacity to pay going forward can apply for HRA's Emergency Rent Assistance program.

Between January 2014 and December 2016, more than 161,000 households received assistance through this program. During that time, the average payment was approximately \$3,400 per case—a figure that, while substantial, represents a fraction of the \$41,000 per year cost for a family in a homeless shelter. At the same time, this administration has reached many more households, providing assistance to 24 percent more cases in 2016 compared to 2013.

Calendar Year	Emergency Rent Assistance		
	Arrears Paid Off (millions)	Cases	Average Paid per Case
2011	\$ 107	40,300	\$ 2,666
2012	\$ 121	44,500	\$ 2,731
2013	\$ 127	47,000	\$ 2,695
2014	\$ 149	48,600	\$ 3,059
2015	\$ 188	54,700	\$ 3,442
2016	\$ 214	58,100	\$ 3,688

Source: Department of Social Services.

**City Family Eviction Prevention Supplement/Exit Plan Supplement (CityFEPS)**

Geared primarily toward families with children in shelter, CityFEPS also helps families currently living in the community but identified as at risk of entering a shelter. To receive preventive rental assistance through CityFEPS, families (1) must be receiving Cash Assistance and currently facing eviction or (2) must have, within the past year, faced eviction or had to leave their apartment for specified reasons.

Through December 2016, CityFEPS has helped 778 households, including some 2,707 people, keep a roof over their heads.

**Special Exit and Prevention Supplement (SEPS)**

In addition to helping people leave shelter, SEPS provides rental assistance for certain low-income, childless single-adult and adult-family households at risk of homelessness and with no housing options except shelter. As of December 2016, SEPS has helped 1,575 households, including 1,696 people, stay in housing in the community.

Together, CityFEPS and SEPS have helped a total of approximately 4,403 New Yorkers stay in their homes between the programs' creation in fiscal year 2015 and December 2016.



Mayor de Blasio hosts a roundtable discussion at the High Bridge Library in the Bronx on legal representation for tenants in Housing Court.



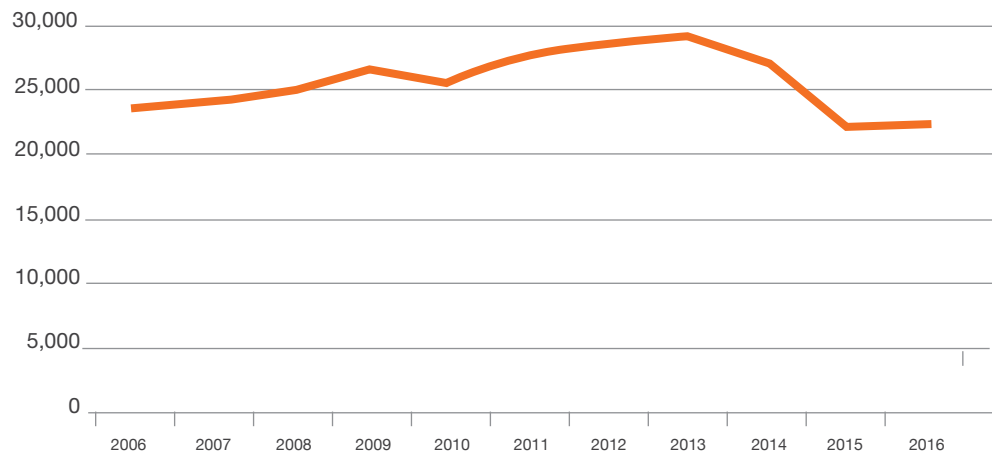
### Fighting Evictions and Harassment through Tenant Legal Services

Historically, only a tiny fraction of tenants in Housing Court—1 percent in 2013, according to court data—have had legal representation. Landlords, on the other hand, are almost always represented by counsel.

The de Blasio administration consolidated existing legal services contracts at HRA and increased funding tenfold, from about \$6 million to \$62 million, so more tenants will have legal representation in Housing Court and protection from illegal harassment, laying the groundwork for this plan’s universal access to legal services for tenants in Housing Court by 2022.

Already, the lopsided representation of landlords and tenants in Housing Court has moved toward a fairer balance, with 27 percent of tenants now receiving legal representation, up from 1 percent. Evictions have also declined significantly. In the 24 months preceding the expansion of legal services there were 56,000 evictions. In the 24 months since the expansion of legal services there have been 42,000 evictions—14,000 fewer evictions, which helped 40,000 people stay in their homes.

Evictions\*



\* Figures for evictions include possessions.

Source: New York City Department of Investigation.





## At-a-Glance: HRA's Tenant Legal Services Programs

**“We are the biggest city in the country to level the playing field between tenants and landlords in housing court. To anyone being forced out of their home or neighborhood, we are fighting for you.”**

**– Mayor Bill de Blasio,  
February 2017**

### Case Study

HRA’s free tenant legal services programs have served more than 34,000 households, including more than 100,000 individuals. These three programs include:

#### The Homelessness Prevention Law Project (HPLP)

As HRA’s primary legal services program, HPLP works with nonprofit legal services providers to deliver advice and legal representation to low-income tenants at risk of homelessness because of eviction.

In fiscal year 2017, HPLP has been funded at \$25.8 million—a more than fivefold increase over fiscal year 2013. This increase will allow the City to continue providing legal services for tenants with incomes at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty level and to expand the targeting to specific high-need neighborhoods.

The Expanded Legal Services (ELS) component of HPLP offers universal legal representation for low-income tenants facing eviction in ten zones across the city, targeted because they include the most households at risk of eviction and homelessness as reflected by rates of shelter entry.

In fiscal year 2017 HPLP, including ELS, is expected to serve more than 17,000 New York City households, including about 51,000 men, women, and children.

#### The Housing Help Program (HHP)

HHP addresses the legal and human services needs of families facing homelessness. Legal services providers offer full representation coupled with social work services. HHP is projected to help approximately 2,400 families, including about 7,200 people, in fiscal year 2017. HHP is jointly funded by the City and the Robin Hood Foundation.

#### The Anti-Harassment and Tenant Protection Program (AHTP)

Launched in January 2016, AHTP helps tenants before they even reach court, with the goal of preventing eviction and homelessness.

In addition to full representation and legal assistance for Housing Court and administrative proceedings, AHTP legal services providers offer community education and landlord-tenant mediation and bring building-wide lawsuits to improve conditions and stop landlord harassment. Currently, seven neighborhoods across the city that have been identified as posing a high risk for landlord harassment and/or tenant displacement have been targeted for AHTP services. In fiscal year 2017, AHTP is expected to serve approximately 13,000 households, including about 39,000 people.

To ensure tenants at risk of harassment are aware of services to help them stay in their homes, the City’s Tenant Support Unit goes door-to-door in targeted zip codes across the five boroughs to inform residents of City resources available to



help them, including legal assistance, HRA’s Emergency Rent Assistance program, the City’s rent freeze initiatives, and repairs through the Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD). Tenant Support Unit staff also hold office hours with local elected officials, community groups, and libraries and partner with HPD’s Division of Code Enforcement, legal service providers, and elected officials to identify landlords who appear to have a pattern of targeting tenants for harassment.



Doubling the funding of Homebase has allowed the program to serve an average of

**11,000**

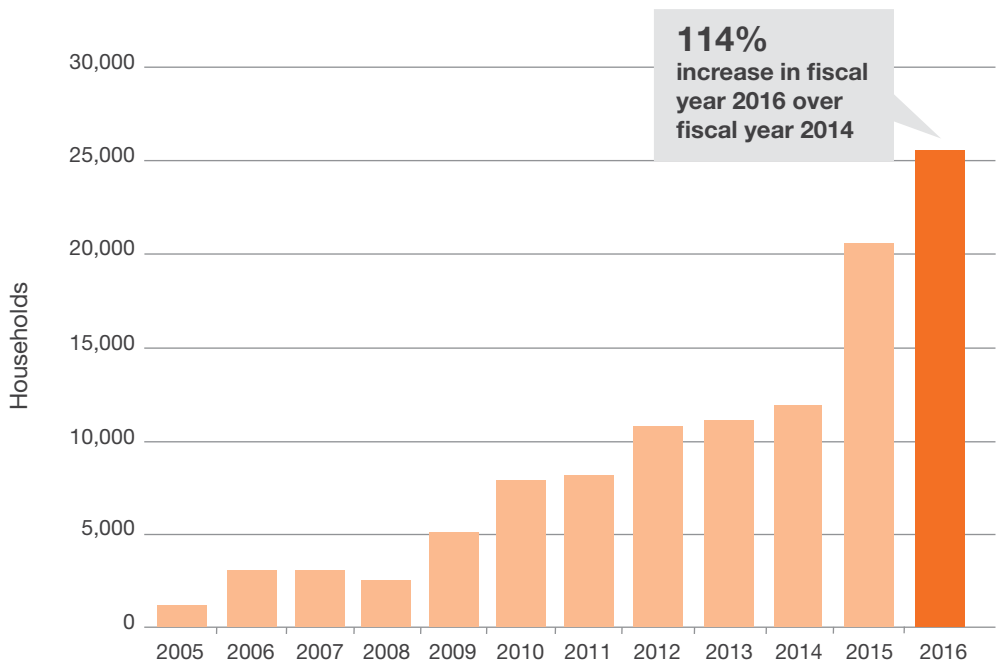
more households

### Homebase Provides Proven Homelessness Prevention Services

Homebase has become a cornerstone of the City’s homelessness prevention strategy. The first point of entry for New Yorkers at risk of homelessness, Homebase was launched by DHS in 2004 but was dramatically expanded by the de Blasio administration, which increased the number of Homebase locations from 14 in fiscal year 2015 to 23 today and doubled the program’s funding.

As a result, the number of households served by Homebase reached 25,632 in fiscal year 2016, compared to 11,950 in fiscal year 2014. This 114 percent increase in the number of households served means that an average of 11,000 more households have been able to receive services from Homebase in each of the past two fiscal years.

Homebase Households Served, by City Fiscal Year



Source: Department of Social Services.



The continued expansion of Homebase in the years ahead, coupled with a widening array of prevention services offered under one roof, will provide pivotal support for the goal to reduce the number of people in City shelters.

### The Demonstrated Success of Homebase

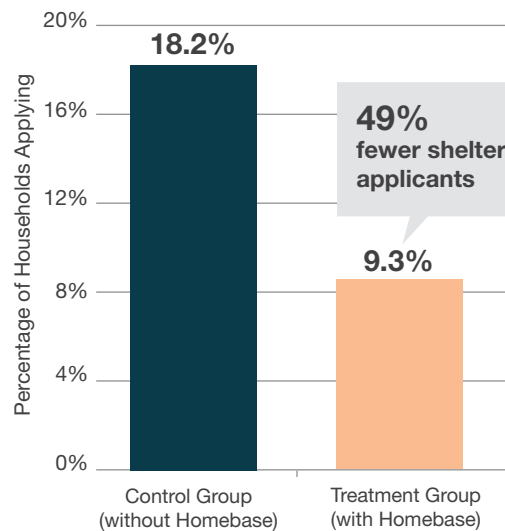
Homebase has become a model for homelessness prevention programs across the country for a simple reason: it works.

A variety of independent evaluations have shown that Homebase can:

- Cut shelter applications nearly in half.<sup>2</sup>
- Reduce the number of days that families spend in shelter by 48.5 percent among families who actually entered shelter.<sup>3</sup>
- Lower the number of shelter entries in communities with a Homebase office.<sup>4</sup>

In addition to these achievements, Homebase is saving more than \$1.37 for every City tax levy dollar invested through the program.<sup>5</sup>

#### Homebase Reduces Shelter Applicants



Note: Using random assignment, this study compared outcomes of two groups of comparable households at risk of becoming homeless—those that received Homebase services (the treatment group) and those that did not receive these services (the control group). Data showed that 18.2 percent of the control group ended up applying for shelter services, while only 9.3 percent of the treatment group did, strongly suggesting that Homebase services made a significant difference in whether families end up requiring shelter services.

Source: Abt Associates. *Evaluation of the Homebase Community Prevention Program*. (2013.)

<sup>2</sup> Abt Associates. (2013.) *Evaluation of the Homebase Community Prevention Program*. Retrieved from <http://www.abtassociates.com/AbtAssociates/files/cf/cf819ade-6613-4664-9ac1-2344225c24d7.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

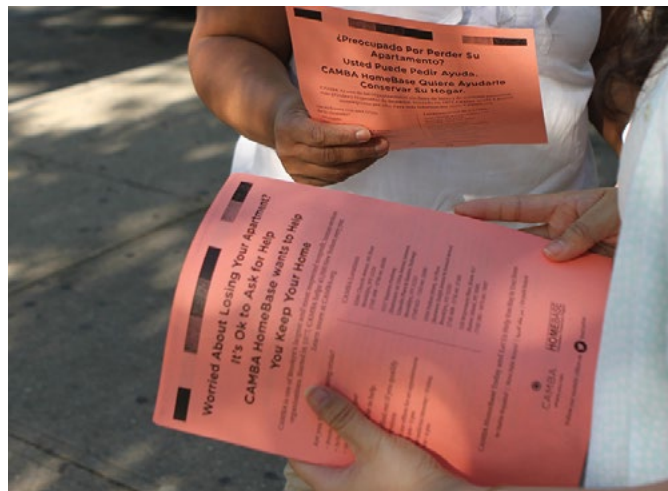
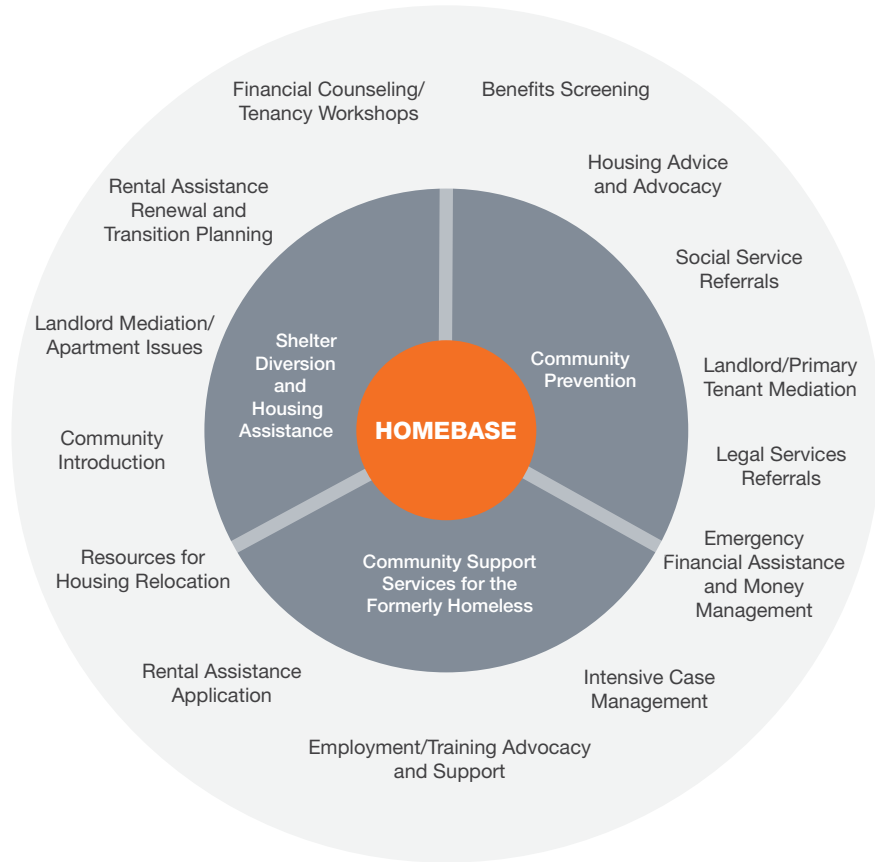
<sup>4</sup> Goodman, S., et al. (2012.) *Does Homelessness Prevention Work? Evidence from New York City's HomeBase Program*. Retrieved from [http://www.law.nyu.edu/sites/default/files/ECM\\_PRO\\_074707.pdf](http://www.law.nyu.edu/sites/default/files/ECM_PRO_074707.pdf). See also Goodman, S., et al. (2015.) "Homelessness Prevention in New York City: On Average, It Works." *Journal of Housing Economics* 31 (2016): 14–34. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jhe.2015.12.001>.

<sup>5</sup> Department of Homeless Services. Testimony before the New York City Council General Welfare Committee Oversight on Homelessness. December 9, 2015. Retrieved from <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/dhs/downloads/pdf/testimony/general-welfare-testimony-120915.pdf>.





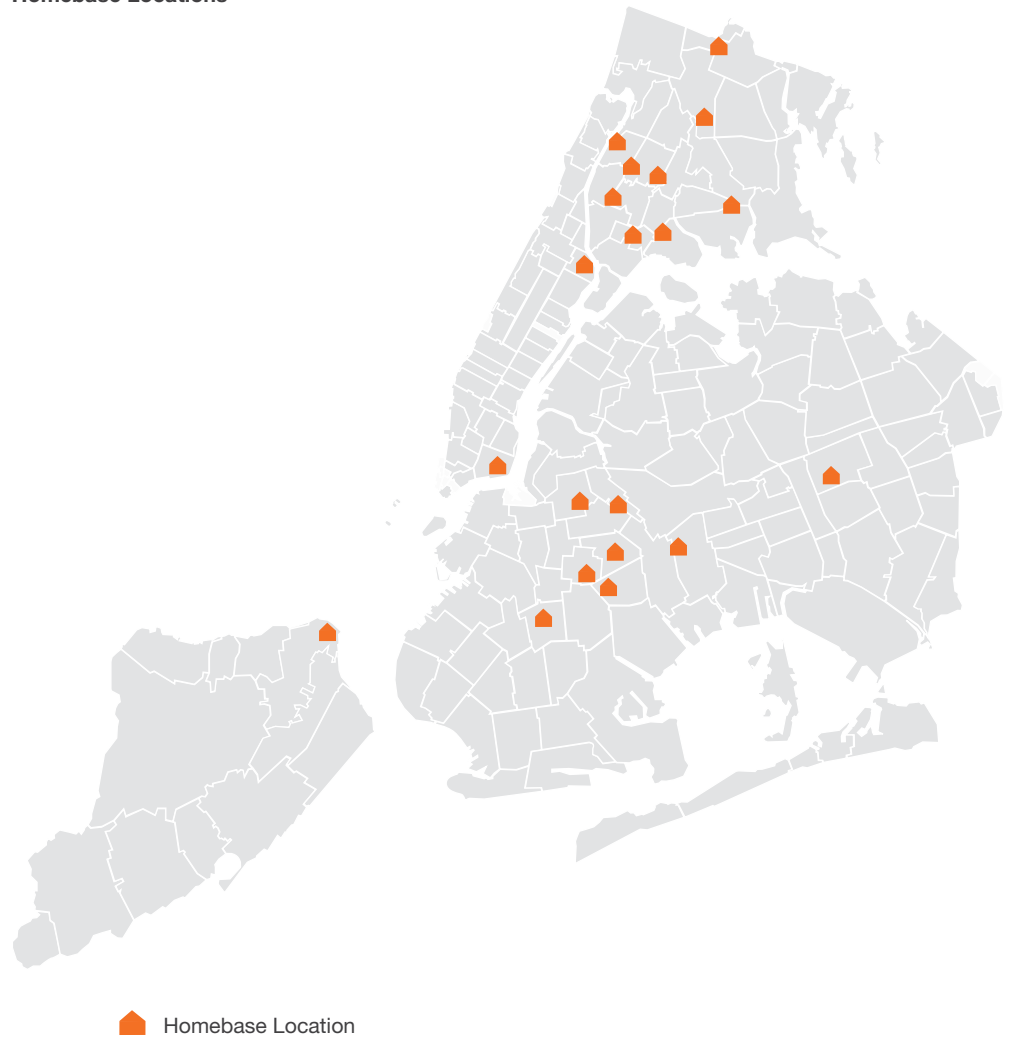
Scope of Homebase Prevention Services



Homebase outreach workers providing homelessness prevention materials in the community.



Homebase Locations



Source: Department of Social Services.

Driven in part by research showing that many at-risk households do not seek assistance before applying for shelter, Homebase staff conduct outreach by going directly into the city’s neighborhoods to engage people in public spaces—outside supermarkets, check cashing businesses, and nail salons or at buildings with many eviction notices. They attend community events, speak at places of worship, and build close referral relationships with neighborhood schools. Together, Homebase’s efforts are a powerful component of the City’s strategy to reduce the number of families and individuals in shelters.



## Michael

BRONX

**Housing:** Two-bedroom apartment he can now afford with a rent subsidy

**Help Provided:** Homebase helped siblings keep their family home after their mother died

### Client's Story

Michael and his sister and two brothers lost their mother to cancer in May 2015. Even before she died, the family struggled with the expenses of her treatment and medications and fell behind on the rent for their two-bedroom Bronx apartment. Michael, age 22 when his mother died, became the head of the household, taking care of his brothers (then ages 21 and 19) and his sister (then age 17). The family's only income came from public assistance benefits and the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) one brother received because of a disability. They were living in their apartment when the Bronx Housing Court referred Michael to a nearby HELP USA Homebase office for assistance. Michael's case was in court for eviction proceedings and the judge made the referral to address the arrears and prevent the eviction.

Homebase encouraged Michael's siblings to continue in school despite their family's recent upheaval. Their case manager advocated with the landlord to have the lease put in Michael's name, deal with the back rent, and agree on a new rent amount that would qualify the family for rental assistance. Homebase also expedited a change required for the family's public assistance case to formally make Michael the head of household. Michael then worked with Homebase and Legal Services NYC to submit a successful application for rental assistance. The family's rent arrears were settled in court, with Homebase paying a portion of the overdue rent and enabling Michael and his three siblings to stay together in the home they had shared with their mother.



### Outreach as a Homelessness Prevention Tool

Many people do not reach out for help before they lose their homes—in part because they never knew help was available. That is why the de Blasio administration has deployed a multifaceted outreach strategy to reach the individuals and families most at risk of losing their homes.

Posters on subways and buses, supplemented with printed brochures, are accompanied by social media marketing as well as television and radio spots. These campaigns also focus on local places of worship, community events, schools, and elected officials, who can help make important connections between prevention services in their communities and the people who need them.

Advertisements for Homebase in subways, buses, and other public locations across the boroughs help to raise awareness of the preventive services available to families and individuals at risk of homelessness.



### Summer Outreach to New York City Schools

Every summer, the number of homeless families in shelter spikes after children are let out of school and families' doubled-up housing arrangements become harder to maintain. In June 2015 and 2016, HRA and DHS partnered with the New York City Department of Education (DOE) to reach out to schools and connect families in vulnerable living arrangements with their local Homebase service providers.

Under the guidance of the City's Public Engagement Unit, trained outreach staff held community-based events and called more than 6,500 households by phone, providing information about the range of services offered by Homebase and making more than 600 immediate referrals to the program and to other resources that help families remain stably housed.

The outreach campaign will be repeated in 2017.

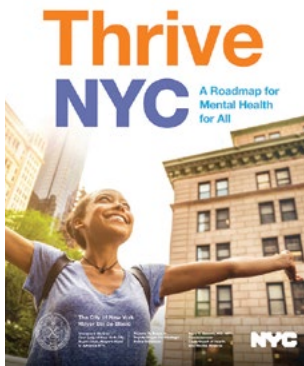
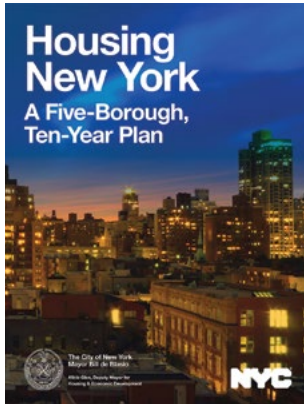


Department of Social Services Commissioner Steven Banks speaking with a community member at a school that participated in Homebase Day of Action.



### The Fight against Income Inequality

In addition to policies specifically targeting homeless New Yorkers and those at risk of homelessness, the de Blasio administration has supported a comprehensive policy agenda focused on fighting poverty and income inequality on a variety of fronts. These efforts are summarized in the chart below.



Program	Services
<b>CUNY ASAP (Accelerated Study in Associate Programs)</b>	Provides extensive academic, financial, and social supports to help students complete their associate's degrees within three years. With new City funding, CUNY will enroll 25,000 students by fiscal year 2019 (up from 3,000 in fiscal year 2014).
<b>Executive Order No. 7 and the Fair Wages for New Yorkers Act (Living Wage Law)</b>	Has broadened the scope and impact of the Living Wage Law by, among other things, increasing the living wage rate and specifying additional covered employers. The current living wage rate is now \$11.70 per hour with health benefits or \$13.40 per hour without health benefits.
<b>Housing New York</b>	Has created or preserved more than 60,000 affordable apartments.
<b>OneNYC Plan</b>	Combines programs to combat poverty and income inequality with initiatives to increase the City's environmental sustainability and disaster preparedness.
<b>Pre-K for All</b>	Funds free, full-day, high-quality universal pre-kindergarten.
<b>Right to Paid Sick Leave</b>	Enables parents to stay home to care for sick children without losing income.
<b>Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP)</b>	Provides New York City youth, ages 14 to 24, with paid summer employment; a record 60,113 individuals were served in the summer of 2016 (fiscal year 2017).
<b>Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)</b>	Improved the application and recertification process for accessing SNAP benefits (commonly known as food stamps), with a citywide information campaign targeting underrepresented groups such as immigrants and seniors.
<b>ThriveNYC</b>	Funds wide-ranging efforts to change the culture surrounding mental health to encourage understanding and early intervention.
<b>In addition, the de Blasio administration has:</b>	
<b>Provided support for jobs and education</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Guaranteed \$15 minimum wage for all City government employees and employees who provide contracted work for the City at social service organizations, benefiting 50,000 New Yorkers.</li> <li>• Leveraged the City's contracting power to provide opportunities for New Yorkers looking for work.</li> <li>• Transitioned the City's workforce programs to the Career Pathways model, which prioritize skills-building for good-paying jobs in growth industries and training programs tailored to meet employers' needs.</li> <li>• Removed application fees to City University of New York (CUNY) schools for low-income applicants.</li> <li>• Raised money to provide computer science education for 1.1 million New York City students.</li> </ul>
<b>Offered protections for rent-burdened New Yorkers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advocated for a rent freeze for rent-stabilized tenants in 2015 and 2016—the first in the history of the Rent Guidelines Board.</li> <li>• Expanded protections for low-income seniors and tenants with disabilities by greatly increasing the maximum income limit and simplifying eligibility requirements for the Senior Citizen Rent Increase Exemption (SCRIE) and Disability Rent Increase Exemption (DRIE) programs.</li> </ul>



Taken together, these initiatives constitute an unprecedented multi-pronged effort that has enabled the City to, first, stem the growth in the DHS shelter census after an increase of 14,000 people—or 38 percent—between 2011 (when the Advantage rental assistance program ended) and 2014, and now to move forward to reduce the census in a way that is sustainable, fair, and fiscally responsible.





## Betty

QUEENS

**Housing:** Apartment with CityFEPS subsidy

**Help Provided:** Prevented eviction

### Client's Story

A single mother of four children, the youngest only nine months old, Betty kept her family afloat on her own income for years, even in the face of significant challenges, including her 11-year-old son's chronic illness and frequent hospitalizations. Then a high-risk pregnancy led to her being placed on mandatory bed rest.

Unable to work, she fell behind on her rent and, in December 2015, received an eviction notice. Betty went to court and had to agree to vacate her apartment by the end of March. As a recipient of public assistance, she was eligible for the CityFEPS rental assistance program, but she still needed to find a new home for her family.

Months passed and Betty could not find an apartment. With March almost over, she and her family returned from two days at the hospital's pediatric hematology and oncology unit to find a notice on their door telling them they would be evicted at 9:30 a.m. the next morning. At 4:45 p.m. Betty and her children rushed to court and then to the offices of the Legal Aid Society to seek help.

An attorney with the Legal Aid Society drafted an Order of Show Cause that night and filed it the following morning. The court signed the order just as the marshal arrived. Their eviction was halted in progress.

HRA's Homelessness Prevention Law Project funded the legal services that fought for Betty in court. And with rental assistance from CityFEPS, her family was able to relocate to a new apartment in their same neighborhood, close to her children's school and to her son's doctor.



**Betty at home with her daughter.**

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Chapter 3

# Housing



# 51,573

New Yorkers are living in permanent housing through the rental assistance and permanent housing programs

## Overview

The City's goal is to prevent as many people from entering shelter as possible, and to make shelter stays as short as possible, by providing eligible families and individuals with the assistance they need to return quickly to their communities and to permanent housing.

Increasing the stock of affordable housing is a key priority, including an unprecedented expansion of supportive housing, which provides onsite social services in addition to subsidized rents. Together, these initiatives have been essential to the City's efforts to stop the dramatic growth in the number of shelters sites and begin to bend the shelter census curve downward.

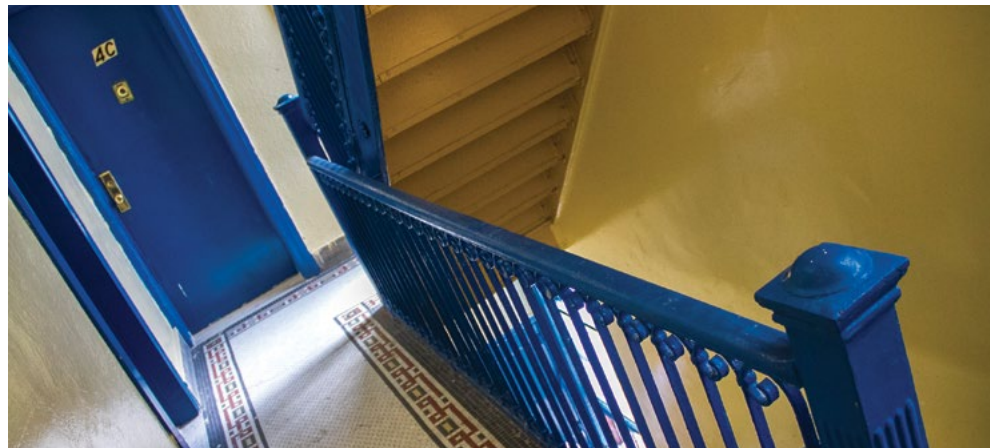
## Key Accomplishments – Comprehensive Initiatives to Make Housing Affordable

- **Launched rental assistance programs** that—along with other housing programs—helped more than 51,500 New Yorkers move out of shelter or avoid homelessness.
- **Ended chronic veteran homelessness** in 2015, as certified by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).
- **Financed more senior housing:** New programs, including the **Senior Affordable Rental Apartments (SARA) program**, have resulted in the new construction and preservation of 1,166 affordable apartments for a growing senior population, who often live on fixed incomes. This brings the total number of senior affordable apartments financed to date to more than 4,000. Significantly, the passage of **Zoning for Quality and Affordability (ZQA)** will allow for additional affordable housing for seniors.
- **Financed more apartments for the very lowest income families:** The federal government has historically provided housing support to the poorest households, while the City supported low-income working households. With Washington cutting back, the de Blasio administration has stepped in with a new **Extremely Low and Low-Income Affordability (ELLA) program**. In 2016, 19 percent of the homes financed were for New Yorkers making less than \$24,500 for a family of three. Approximately 4,200 homes for extremely low income families were financed last year, bringing the three-year total to 8,877.





- **Instituted new rules for growth:** Implemented the strongest Mandatory Inclusionary Housing (MIH) program in the nation, which requires developers to create permanently affordable housing as a condition of development in areas rezoned for growth. To date, 4,500 housing units have been approved under MIH, 1,500 of which will be permanently affordable.
- **Financed stable housing for formerly homeless New Yorkers:** Through a coordinated, multi-agency strategy to help address homelessness and return families to stable housing, the City financed 2,729 apartments for formerly homeless households and 2,431 supportive housing units under *Housing New York*.
- **Created easier access:** Introduced new affordable housing lottery rules to make it simpler and fairer to apply. The changes prohibit owners from rejecting an applicant solely on the basis of credit history or Housing Court history, promote a streamlined interview process to reduce applicant no-shows, offer greater language access and accessibility for people with disabilities at all stages of the application process, require consistency in how developers and marketing agents communicate with applicants, increase privacy protections, and increase transparency of the appeal process.



## The Road Ahead

- **Rental Assistance.** The City will streamline its existing rental assistance programs—which are critical to its efforts to reduce the number of New Yorkers in homeless shelters—to improve their effectiveness and efficiency. The City will continue to support people who house family members so they can avoid going into shelter. It will also work closely with landlords to help them understand how they can benefit from accepting rental assistance vouchers as well as their legal obligations to do so.



- **Supportive Housing.** The City will realize the full benefits of the Mayor’s landmark plan to fund 15,000 additional supportive housing units over the next 15 years, specifically by implementing the recommendations of the Mayor’s Supportive Housing Task Force.
- **Affordable Housing.** The City is on track to provide 200,000 affordable units, having financed more of them in 2016 than in any year in the past 25 years. Because the City passed the most rigorous inclusionary housing program in the nation last spring, lower income New Yorkers will benefit from citywide amendments that require developers to include permanently affordable housing in new developments whenever the City has rezoned the land to allow more residential development. Having presided over one of the most significant overhauls of the zoning resolution since 1961, the City is working with developers to ensure that measures to cut the cost of development result in more development of affordable housing.

In 2017, the City announced two major initiatives to help seniors, veterans, and low-income families afford rent in New York City. The first will increase by 10,000 the number of apartments in *Housing New York* serving households earning less than \$40,000—5,000 of which will be dedicated to seniors and 500 for veterans. The second is a new Elder Rent Assistance program to be funded by the City’s proposed Mansion Tax.

The de Blasio administration has proposed serving more than 25,000 seniors with monthly rental assistance of up to \$1,300. The City’s ability to implement this rental assistance plan is dependent on Albany’s willingness to pass the Mansion Tax. To increase the number of apartments dedicated to low-income households in the Mayor’s housing program from 40,000 to 50,000, the City is committing an additional \$1.9 billion to achieve this deepened affordability through the duration of the *Housing New York* plan. With this increased funding, the ELLA and SARA programs, among others, will be expanded. These programs, established in 2014, are already firmly in place and exceeding their targets.

- **Additional Approaches.** The City will continue to prioritize a targeted number of homeless households in New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) public housing, expand community support services for households transitioning from shelter to permanent housing, and leverage public-private partnerships to create innovative programs to further assist New Yorkers who are homeless. All these initiatives will help the City reduce the number of homeless New Yorkers.



Two vacant lots owned by a church in the Bronx will be transformed—with financing through the New York Acquisition Loan Fund—into TLK Manor (in rendering, above). This new development will include 82 affordable units.





**62,506**

affordable housing units have already been financed during this administration

## Affordable Housing: Building a Fairer Future

The administration has already financed 62,506 affordable housing units, enough to serve more than 162,000 New Yorkers. As a result, the City is ahead of schedule to meet the *Housing New York* goal of financing the new construction or preservation of 200,000 units of housing in 10 years. Significantly, more than a quarter of these units house New Yorkers with income less than \$31,750 (individual) or \$40,800 (family of three). More than 14 percent serve individuals with income less than \$19,050 a year, and families of three with income less than \$24,500.

In the coming years, the impact of *Housing New York* will be felt in more communities as newly built affordable apartments and targeted preservation programs lock in affordable homes in neighborhoods across the city. These initiatives are an important component of the administration’s efforts to prevent and thereby reduce homelessness.

### Income Levels Compared to Area Median Income

Households are considered rent burdened if they spend more than 30 percent of their income on housing costs.

Income Band	Percentage of AMI*	Annual Income (Three-Person Household)
Extremely Low Income	0–30%	< \$24,500
Very Low Income	31–50%	\$24,501–\$40,800
Low Income	51–80%	\$40,801–\$65,250
Moderate Income	81–120%	\$65,251–\$97,920
Middle Income	121–165%	\$97,921–\$134,640

\*AMI is Area Median Income

Sources: Income Band/Percentage of AMI definitions based on the *Housing New York* plan (page 11) ([http://www.nyc.gov/html/housing/assets/downloads/pdf/housing\\_plan.pdf](http://www.nyc.gov/html/housing/assets/downloads/pdf/housing_plan.pdf)). The 2016 Annual Income figures are from HUD: <http://www1.nyc.gov/site/hpd/about/what-is-affordable-housing.page>.

Construction has begun on the inaugural HomeStretch project, the Landing Road Residence in the Bronx. The finished building (in rendering, far right) will combine transitional shelter and permanent affordable housing.





### New Approaches to Financing Affordable Housing

Homeless families and individuals will also benefit from new mechanisms to finance affordable housing for extremely low income households.

- **OurSpace:** Launched in 2016, OurSpace will create units that can be rented to homeless families and individuals who do not have rental assistance. Rather than rely on conventional rental assistance programs, which are subject to annual appropriation, OurSpace provides a capital subsidy to developers in addition to the funds available through HPD's New Construction programs.
- **HomeStretch:** Launched in 2015, HomeStretch leverages shelter financing to provide cost-effective, purpose-built shelter and affordable housing for formerly homeless households on the same site. The first HomeStretch project, the Landing Road Residence, under development by the Bowery Residents Committee (BRC), will include a 200-bed emergency shelter for working homeless single adults and 135 low-income permanent housing units affordable to extremely low and very low income households. Landing Road began construction in June 2015. Additional HomeStretch developments are in the pipeline.

### Buildings Using 421-a Tax Incentives

To increase the number of affordable housing units available for homeless households, the City is piloting a requirement that owners of new buildings benefiting from the expired 421-a tax exemption make apartments available to households referred by the Human Resources Administration (HRA) and DHS. 421-a projects with affordable units subject to a community preference that are being marketed by HPD or HDC are required to rent up to half the community preference units to eligible homeless households from the community. These households must also meet the project's income requirements and other eligibility criteria permitted by the HPD/HDC Marketing Handbook. Twenty percent of a typical project subject to the requirements in effect under the 421-a law that expired in 2015 are considered to be affordable units; of the affordable units, half are filled through a community preference, and up to half of those (5 percent of all the building's apartments) will be used to provide housing opportunities for formerly homeless households from the community.

### Redrawing the City's Roadmap for Growth

The approval in March 2016 of two citywide amendments to the Zoning Resolution, known as Mandatory Inclusionary Housing (MIH) and Zoning for Quality and Affordability (ZQA), will support the City's efforts to preserve and build new affordable housing.

MIH requires that residential buildings constructed in areas rezoned to allow significant new housing capacity must include a share of the apartments as permanently affordable apartments. It is by far the most rigorous inclusionary housing policy in the nation.



ZQA supports development of more affordable housing, lowers construction costs, removes barriers to senior housing, and eliminates outdated rules such as parking space requirements. It was one of the largest overhauls of the City’s zoning code since 1961.

These varied approaches to providing affordable housing should create lasting benefits, as the new homes constructed will provide opportunities for all low-income New Yorkers, whether homeless or not, to find a stable home in the community and allow others to stay in their current homes.

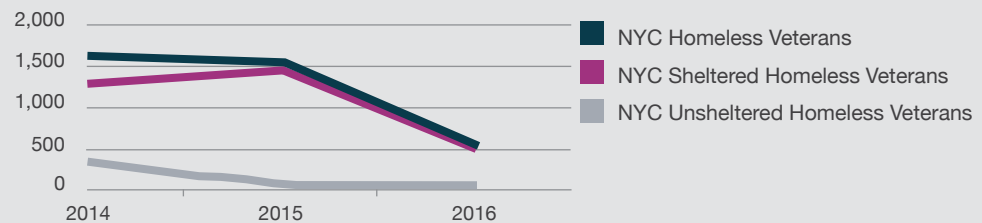


## Ending Chronic Veteran Homelessness in New York City

### Case Study

The successful end of chronic veteran homelessness in New York City,<sup>1</sup> as certified in December 2015 by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), was accomplished through the strategic coordination of federal and City resources. It represents the kind of achievement that happens when resources are carefully matched to needs and practices are attuned to evidence.

New York City Veteran Homelessness 2014-2016



Source: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development *Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR)*, 2016 Part 1.

By focusing on veterans who were unsheltered or chronically homeless—those who were in shelter the longest and had barriers to independent living—the City successfully targeted services to the veterans most in need. The City is also committed to addressing homelessness among all veterans, and in the past three years it has decreased veteran homelessness by 66 percent and permanently housed 3,153 veterans. Through this effort, the City has created a system to identify, support, and rehouse homeless veterans, and to help prevent homelessness for veterans who are at risk of entering shelter.

<sup>1</sup> Press Release: Federal Government Announces New York City Has Ended Chronic Veteran Homelessness, December 30, 2015: <http://www1.nyc.gov/office-of-the-mayor/news/984-15/federal-government-newyork-city-has-ended-chronic-veteran-homelessness>.



Mayor de Blasio helps veteran Samuel Rosado move into his new home in December 2016.

Since January 2014, the City's focused efforts and innovative policies have connected veterans and their families to quality housing. The City instituted a peer-to-peer model for veteran engagement and direct housing assistance. Working in close collaboration with government and nonprofit partners, the City identified every homeless veteran living in shelter, in transitional housing, and on the street. Along with the New York City Coalition on the Continuum of Care Veterans Task Force, the City conducted weekly case conferences with shelter providers to ensure that every veteran was screened and had a housing plan and that any bottlenecks were immediately addressed. Interagency coordination was optimized through daily operations calls. Additional strategies included data sharing, improved reporting, and new tools such as a veteran database and daily dashboard.

To achieve its mission, the City prioritized placing veterans who were unsheltered or chronically homeless and coordinated with NYCHA, HPD, and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to ensure that all eligible veterans were connected to the HUD-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) program, a valuable federal resource that combines rental assistance vouchers with case management and clinical services provided by the VA at VA Medical Centers and community-based clinics. The City has also used two other federal programs, the VA's Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) and Grant-per-Diem (GPD) beds to address veteran homelessness. Using GPD, the City expanded the availability of permanent homes by converting VA-funded transitional housing into permanent housing with leases. SSVF programs, run by local nonprofits, have provided low-income veterans and their families with case management and assistance in obtaining VA and other benefits and services, such as housing, healthcare, transportation, childcare, independent living skills, financial planning, and legal assistance.



A veteran discusses resources and available apartments with social service providers at a housing forum held at DHS offices in Manhattan.

Far right: Veterans' apartments in the Bronx.





While the steady stream of HUD-VASH vouchers and the influx of SSVF financial assistance made a tremendous impact on housing homeless veterans, not every veteran who required shelter qualified for a VASH voucher. To help veterans who did not qualify for a VASH voucher, New York City:

- Targeted veterans with the City’s Special Exit and Prevention Supplement (SEPS) rental assistance program.
- Committed 200 HPD Section 8 vouchers, which allow low-income households to rent privately owned housing, to veterans who needed long-term rental assistance.
- Focused efforts on linking veterans to available apartments using other rent subsidies.
- Prioritized veteran referrals for City- and State-funded supportive housing, which provides a permanent, affordable place to live combined with onsite services.

The City also needed a commitment of housing stock. In the fall of 2015, the City created a housing supply plan based on input from public and private partners. This plan included allocating vacancies in existing housing as well as developing new housing opportunities.

The City has made tremendous progress, and the new initiatives and systems now in place will enable the administration to continue its commitment to housing homeless veterans.

### **Rental Assistance: Providing a Critical Bridge between Shelter and the Community**

The City’s current set of targeted rental assistance programs recognizes the varied needs of families and individuals leaving shelter or seeking assistance to avoid entering shelter.

Launched from July 2014 to August 2015, these programs have been an important part of the City’s efforts to stop growth in the shelter census and will be a key component of the effort now to begin to reduce the number of New Yorkers living in homeless shelters. These programs have placed a record number of people in permanent housing and reduced the rate of return to shelter to a historic low. More than 51,500 New Yorkers are living in permanent housing and have exited or avoided shelter by using the City’s rental assistance programs and other special housing initiatives from July 2014 through December 2016.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> An additional rental assistance initiative, not listed on the chart on the next page, is Home for the Holidays, now known as Pathway Home. Announced at the end of 2016, this program was created to enable families with children to leave shelter by staying with family or friends. The City makes monthly payments for up to one year to households hosting these families in transition while they look for a home of their own.

# Rental Assistance and Rehousing Programs in NYC

From July 2014 through December 2016

## 51,573

People housed in 18,653 households

### LINC

Living in Communities



**14,831**

men, women, and children housed in 6,618 households



Households generally contribute 30% of gross income to rent.



LINC targets shelter populations such as families with children, survivors of domestic violence, people with disabilities, and seniors.

### CityFEPS

City Family Eviction Prevention Supplement



**11,387**

men, women, and children housed in 3,272 households



Supplement is variable and determined at signup.



CityFEPS is not time limited, and the supplement amount may change with household composition or income.

### SEPS

Special Exit and Prevention Supplement



**2,148**

individual adults and adult family members housed in 1,913 households



Households generally pay 30% of any earned or unearned income toward rent.



SEPS is the first large-scale City-funded rental assistance program for singles and households without children in shelter and in the community, assisting homeless and at-risk veterans, households engaged by HRA's Adult Protective Services who are losing their homes, and evicted households residing in shelter.

### HOME TBRA

Tenant-Based Rental Assistance



**1,039**

family members and chronically street homeless individuals housed in 314 households



Households generally contribute 30% of adjusted income to rent.



HOME TBRA is federally funded by HUD and administered by the City's HRA.

### Section 8

Housing Choice Voucher Program



**5,741**

men, women, and children housed in 1,768 households



The average tenant share is \$403, or 29%, of the average monthly rent of \$1,393.



Section 8 voucher program allows participants to rent private apartments.

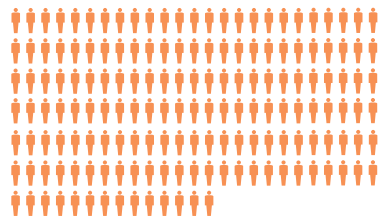
### NYCHA

Public Housing Section 8 and Priority Referrals



**16,427**

men, women, and children housed in 4,768 households



Households generally contribute 30% of adjusted income to rent.



NYCHA's Conventional Public Housing Program has 177,657 apartments in 2,547 residential buildings in 328 developments throughout New York City.

This icon represents 100 people:

These icons represent the groups targeted by each rental assistance program: Adult Families Families with Children Single Adults Street Homeless Individuals





## Clarice\*

BRONX

**Housing:** HOME Tenant-Based Rental Assistance (HOME TBRA) apartment

**Help Provided:** Connected family to a new home through a rental assistance program



## Anita\*

BROOKLYN

**Housing:** Living In Communities (LINC) II apartment

**Help Provided:** Moved family from shelter with a rental assistance program

\* Details have been changed to protect client privacy.

### Client's Story

Two years ago, Clarice, 34, entered shelter, where she would spend the next 18 months living with her two children. Born in the Bronx, she had moved to Florida for the promise of a new life and affordable housing. After struggling for some time, she returned to New York, where she and her two kids shuttled between relatives' homes and eventually had to enter shelter.

During the summer of 2015, Clarice applied for the City's new tenant-based rental assistance subsidy called HOME. A federally funded program, HOME is specifically for households, including families with children in shelter, that include someone with a disability, like Clarice's daughter. After qualifying last February, Clarice attended a briefing to receive her HOME voucher. Her housing specialist connected Clarice to a broker and together they began the process of finding a new home that would accommodate her family. After a few weeks of viewing apartments, she secured permanent housing in a two-bedroom apartment in the Bronx.

Since moving out of shelter, Clarice says her quality of life has improved; she is taking better care of herself and her family, and cooking healthier meals. "Life is much easier now," she says. She and her two daughters treasure the routine of their new home life.

### Client's Story

Three years ago, Anita, 38, and her four children ranging in age from 2 to 8 years old, were forced to leave the home they shared with family. After two years of living in shelter, Anita and her children were told they qualified for a new rental assistance program called LINC II. She began actively looking for an apartment. After a three-week search, Anita found a three-bedroom home in Brooklyn.

Her new place is a short train ride away from the neighborhood where she grew up. Anita likes the area and is reassured by having an affordable lease with the LINC program. She works as a part-time home health aide and receives Cash Assistance benefits to supplement her household income. In addition to her part-time job, she participates in HRA's employment program, attending job readiness training and computer classes. Anita credits LINC with getting her family out of shelter. She is happy with the program.



### **Reaching out to Landlords—Key Partners for Continued Success**

The City’s goal has been to design cost-effective rental assistance programs that work for both tenants and landlords. Landlords are vital to the success of these efforts.

To build on the success of rental assistance as a bridge from shelter to the community or to avoid shelter entries altogether, both HRA and DHS will continue to work closely with landlords, management companies, and brokers to obtain useful feedback about the City’s rental assistance programs.

The City will also continue reaching out to landlords to ensure that they are aware of the incentives offered by its rental assistance programs. The City’s Public Engagement Unit has a team of staff focused exclusively on outreach to landlords and brokers—fostering lasting relationships built on trust—in recognition of the fact they are partners in the mission. This team also recognizes that to successfully move an increased number of families and individuals out of shelter, the City must move with the speed of the increasingly competitive private market—as well as assist in connecting the landlord and tenant to community support from Homebase and other resources to ensure permanency and stability. Thanks to this proactive approach, more landlords and brokers are opting to work with the City—and offering vacancies again as they arise. The benefits and incentives for landlords offered by the City include:

- Quick apartment registration and inspection.
- Payment at lease signing of four months’ rent, instead of the usual one month.
- A \$1,000 bonus per apartment paid at lease signing.

Brokers can also qualify for a bonus of 15 percent of the annual rent upon lease signing, rather than the typical one-month fee.

### **Protecting Tenant Rights: A Citywide Effort**

Landlords with a building of six or more units cannot refuse to lease to tenants who would use government assistance to pay a portion of their rent. Called source of income (SOI) discrimination, this practice is illegal as a result of legislation Mayor de Blasio sponsored when he was in the City Council. The City is implementing a comprehensive response to combat it.

Through its newly formed SOI discrimination unit, HRA will take action to prevent and prosecute housing discrimination based on source of income:

- Intervening on behalf of tenants who have been refused an apartment, with the goal of getting them an apartment.
- Providing legal advice and consultation to other City agencies, as well as guidance to community advocates on the City’s position concerning SOI discrimination.



- Initiating investigations of housing providers to:
  - 1) identify their real estate portfolio and past complaints, and
  - 2) test their acceptance of rental assistance vouchers.
- Filing and prosecuting complaints that allege a pattern and practice of SOI discrimination in State Supreme Court on behalf of the City.

Meanwhile, the City Commission on Human Rights (CCHR) is actively fighting SOI discrimination, having announced in January 2017 that it had filed five complaints against large landlords and brokerage firms that together control about 20,000 units citywide. The complaints charge discrimination for refusing to accept prospective tenants' government assistance housing vouchers, including Section 8 and LINC vouchers, in violation of the NYC Human Rights Law.

In 2015 CCHR quadrupled the number of investigations into SOI discrimination, and in 2016 it filed more than 120 SOI discrimination investigations—the highest number in its history.

CCHR will continue to make fighting this form of discrimination one of its top priorities.



This supportive housing project on Boston Road in the Bronx, run by Breaking Ground and opened last year, provides 154 units for formerly homeless single adults and low-income individuals from the area.

Above: A sunny unit in Boston Road supportive housing includes a kitchen and dining area.





The lobby of Boston Road supportive housing shares the ground floor with offices for supportive services, an exercise room, and a computer lab.



# 15,000

additional units of supportive housing will be created

## Supportive Housing: Providing Essential Services

Supportive housing is a proven, cost-effective approach to addressing the needs of homeless people struggling with mental illness, substance use disorders, and other barriers to independence. By providing tenants with permanent, rent-stabilized housing with access to onsite case management, alcohol and substance use programs, and other social services, supportive housing reduces the need for placement in higher cost homeless shelters, hospitals, mental health institutions, jails, and prisons.

In November 2015, Mayor de Blasio stepped up the City's commitment to these New Yorkers, announcing NYC 15/15, his landmark plan to provide 15,000 additional units of supportive housing over the next 15 years.

Significant progress toward this goal has already been made. Since January 2014, HPD has financed more than 2,400 supportive housing units. That number includes units financed under an earlier agreement with the State—called the New York/New York III Agreement—as well as the early stages of the Mayor's 15,000-unit pledge.

Additional supportive housing is already coming online. In December 2016, HRA awarded contracts to develop 550 scattered-site supportive housing units this year to 11 organizations with vast experience addressing these clients' complex needs. These units will house chronically homeless adult families and single adults who have serious mental illnesses and/or substance use disorders. The selected nonprofits will provide a wide range of supportive services that include case management and health and wellness programs.







### Tapping Expert Advice to Improve Supportive Housing

Shortly after announcing his historic NYC 15/15 plan, the Mayor convened the Supportive Housing Task Force—28 experts from the public, private, and nonprofit sectors—to advise the City on implementing the plan.

The Task Force’s report, issued in December 2016, made recommendations to improve key aspects of supportive housing, including:

- Targeting units to three broad populations—adults, families, and youth—and incorporating a vulnerability index to prioritize placements.
- Allowing additional professionals such as licensed clinical social workers and psychologists to complete mental health evaluations to expedite the application process and increase access.
- Using evidence-based practices and emphasizing supportive housing staff development.

The City is implementing these recommendations to ensure that its supportive housing resources provide homeless individuals and families with the most beneficial services available.

In January 2016, Mayor de Blasio assembled the 28-member Supportive Housing Task Force to recommend best practices and innovations for his landmark expansion of supportive housing, NYC 15/15.





## Raoul\*

BRONX

**Housing:** Supportive housing

**Help Provided:** Assisted with transition from prison and shelter stays to supportive housing

\* Details have been changed to protect client privacy.

### Client's Story

After being released from prison followed by several stays in shelters, Raoul entered the DHS Blake Avenue Men's Shelter in 2015. He had not been regularly taking his psychotropic medication to treat schizophrenia and was self-medicating with synthetic marijuana, known as K2, when he entered the Blake Avenue Shelter, which is operated by Services for the UnderServed.

Since his wallet had been stolen during a previous hospitalization, Raoul had no identification. His mental health symptoms along with his frustration made him extremely resistant to addressing his circumstances. With the help and support of his service coordinator at the shelter, Raoul reconnected to mental health services and started taking his medication on a daily basis. As he stabilized and made steady progress—including getting his lost ID replaced—the staff's focus turned to housing. Raoul needed an elevator building or a low-floor apartment because of his medical condition. With the help of housing specialists, he applied and was accepted into supportive housing. Late last year, he moved into a studio apartment with onsite social services in the Bronx.

## Additional Initiatives to Reduce Homelessness

### Placements through Public Housing

NYCHA is one of the City's greatest affordable housing assets. To address the ongoing challenge of homelessness, the City plans to continue prioritizing a targeted number of homeless households for NYCHA units—a practice begun by Mayor Ed Koch that was discontinued in recent years and then reestablished by the de Blasio administration.

### Community Support Services Smooth the Transition from Shelter

To help stabilize the lives and daily routines of people who were once homeless, the City will consolidate and expand a crucial set of community services that target and support formerly homeless households in their new permanent housing.

HRA and DHS will do this by incorporating the City's experience with the Home to Stay program's evidence-based practice of Critical Time Intervention (CTI) to engage families through intensive case management.





Developed in 2014, funded by the Robin Hood Foundation, and expanded to four DHS providers to engage clients for the duration of the crucial transition from shelter to permanent housing, Home to Stay worked with hundreds of families that had repeated episodes of homelessness and thus were far more likely to return to shelter.

A new HRA Request for Proposal (RFP) for contracts that will begin in July 2017 will build on this experience by combining the current Homebase homelessness prevention funding with additional community support service funds provided by the administration, increasing by \$16 million over the fiscal year 2016 level.

These transitional services begin with outreach to all households leaving shelter through a rental assistance program, as early as possible in their tenancy, followed by a thorough assessment, the development of an individualized service plan, and the use of CTI or similar evidence-driven models for the most at-risk households. Services include long-term support as well as engagement with households in the midst of short-term housing crises.

In addition to homelessness prevention, Homebase provides community support services to formerly homeless households to address issues raised by tenants or landlords. HRA workers will also be onsite to process tenants' public assistance benefits, freeing Homebase staffers to focus on case management, mediation, education, employment, and financial literacy.



Matoka, a Moving On client, unpacks in her new home—having moved on from supportive housing.

### Public-Private Initiatives Surmount Obstacles to Stable Housing

To help people return to stable housing or remain in their existing communities, the City will also leverage important public-private partnerships that bring together a variety of organizations and City agencies. Examples include:

**Moving On** is an initiative growing out of a partnership of the City, the Robin Hood Foundation, the Corporation for Supportive Housing, and five nonprofit supportive housing providers. It helps tenants in supportive housing who are ready to move on to more independent settings to do so by providing them with a Section 8 voucher and assistance locating new housing. This creates new vacancies in existing supportive housing for those clients in need in shelters or on the streets. The Moving On program is now being evaluated for expansion; currently HPD has issued 125 vouchers, and 40 people have relocated from supportive housing into their own apartments in more independent settings.



This family found permanent housing through the Come Home NYC program.



## 35%

of households with children in shelter include an employed adult

**Come Home NYC** is led by Enterprise Community Partners in cooperation with DHS, Robin Hood's Single Stop, and more than 25 private and nonprofit landlords. In 2015, the Come Home NYC pilot was increased to connect 300 homeless families that earn 30 to 60 percent of the area median income (AMI) to affordable homes over the next two years. The AMI for the New York City region for 2016 is \$81,600 for a family of three, with 30 to 60 percent of AMI ranging between \$24,500 and \$48,960.

According to a recent analysis, 35 percent of all households with children in shelter include an adult who is currently employed.<sup>3</sup> Identifying these households and helping them navigate the affordable housing application and leasing process is an important step in returning them to their own home. Come Home NYC reached its first major milestone of placing 100 homeless families into permanent housing in the fall of 2016.<sup>4</sup> The pilot is expected to continue through this year.

### Shortening the Path Back Home

The City is also working with the Corporation for Supportive Housing, Enterprise, the Supportive Housing Network of New York, and the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness to strengthen and standardize the City shelter intake's assessment process and establish a systematic approach to target and prioritize housing interventions. Six DHS shelters have implemented the Coordinated Assessment and Placement System (CAPS) to eliminate bottlenecks and match eligible residents with vacant units. The goal of CAPS is to help homeless people exit shelter as quickly as possible by better understanding the needs of those entering shelter and immediately connecting them with the right assistance. Another goal is to prioritize and target available resources to those who need help the most.

<sup>3</sup> DHS Profile of Families with Children in Shelter as of December 2, 2016.

<sup>4</sup> NYS Attorney General Eric T. Schneiderman May 19, 2015, press release at <https://ag.ny.gov/press-release/ag-schneiderman-robin-hood-foundation-announce-program-help-homeless-families-obtain>.



## Justin

BRONX

**Housing: HUD-VASH  
apartment**

**Help Provided: Secured his  
subsidized housing with HRA  
emergency assistance**

### Client's Story

The holiday season was very special for Justin. In December 2016 the Vietnam-era veteran moved into his own apartment in the Bronx through the HUD-VASH program—after several months in the DHS Borden Avenue Shelter for veterans in Queens and, before that, surviving on the streets for three years doing odd jobs and finding public places to wash and care for himself. He had previously worked as a contractor, doing both plumbing and electrical jobs. Justin first became homeless after losing the apartment he shared for 10 years with his then girlfriend.

A Veterans Affairs worker was instrumental in persuading Justin to leave the streets and try the DHS Borden Avenue Shelter run by the Institute for Community Living. She also coordinated with his caseworker at HRA's Veterans Job Center to help him pursue permanent housing. In this team effort, HRA provided an emergency assistance grant for one month's rent in advance and a security voucher to secure his Marble Hill apartment in the Bronx. The agency also provided him with an allowance to furnish his new home. Justin got the keys, moved in, and looks forward to cooking for himself on a regular basis and to rejoining the workforce. He is grateful to have his own space.





**Justin**

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Chapter 4

# Street Homelessness



### The City's Responsibility

“Every homeless person had a path to the streets. Each one needs to find a path back from the streets. It is our responsibility to help them get there.”

– Mayor de Blasio,  
December 2015

## Overview

The most visible homeless people in the city, and therefore often the most distressing to New Yorkers, are the approximately 2,800 individuals living on the street.

The City is addressing this problem with the most comprehensive program ever created to provide immediate and long-term services to street homeless men and women. This program has already demonstrated its value by helping 690 individuals come off and stay off the street in 2016. With core programs to assist street homeless people having proved their effectiveness in 2016, the de Blasio administration is committed to continuing and expanding these initiatives in 2017.

As the City succeeds in moving more people off the street, additional people will come into shelters. To address this, the City will continue to move forward with Mayor de Blasio's plan to provide 15,000 additional units of supportive housing over the next 15 years, since for many individuals who were formerly street homeless, supportive housing represents the most sustainable path to a stable life in their communities.<sup>1</sup>

## Key Accomplishments – Most Comprehensive Initiatives in the US

The City's accomplishments provide the foundation for further progress in the fight against street homelessness. The City has already:

- **Created and implemented HOME-STAT**, the most comprehensive street homeless outreach effort in any U.S. city.
- **Worked every day to identify every individual** living on the street and add them to the City's comprehensive by-name list so they can receive coordinated care.

<sup>1</sup> For more about supportive housing and this administration's landmark plan, called NYC 15/15, see “Supportive Housing: Providing Essential Services,” pages 49-50.





- **Doubled the number of outreach workers**—from 191 to 387—who assist street homeless men and women.
- **Increased the tools and resources** to help the outreach workers do their job.
- **Strengthened coordination** among agencies to ensure that each individual receives the services he or she needs.
- **Ended chronic veterans' homelessness**, as determined by the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)—an outcome that required finding homes for many street homeless veterans.

## The Road Ahead

Throughout 2017 the City will continue to bring more people off the street by:

- **Identifying New Yorkers living on the street** through canvassing and quarterly counts so outreach workers can find them and offer services.
- **Adding those identified to the citywide by-name list**, which helps the City and outreach workers share information about each client across multiple agencies and service providers; this, in turn, ensures that each client is approached appropriately and offered the services most likely to help that individual move off the streets.
- **Expanding new partnerships with libraries and hospitals** to reach street homeless individuals who spend time at those locations.
- **Building on the success of the expanded NYPD Crisis Outreach and Support Unit**,<sup>2</sup> which focuses on assisting homeless individuals both directly and in partnership with outreach workers and other City agencies.
- **Using the increased number of street outreach workers to serve more street homeless individuals.**
- **Providing more of the resources outreach workers need to succeed**, including transitional programs that are more effective for many street homeless individuals who are resistant to going into homeless shelters—specifically, opening more Safe Havens, drop-in and respite centers, and beds in houses of worship.
- **Strengthening the case conference process**, which brings street homeless providers and City agencies together to develop solutions for individuals who share similar hurdles.
- **Implementing StreetSmart**—one of the first products to leverage the first-ever citywide confidential data-sharing framework—to provide street outreach workers



Mayor de Blasio and DSS Commissioner Steven Banks join a team from the service provider BRC to conduct homeless outreach in the subways.

<sup>2</sup> Formerly known as the Homeless Outreach Unit.



Jeanette, an employee of homeless services provider Urban Pathways for 18 years, prepares a meal for clients at Hegeman Safe Haven in Brooklyn. In her unofficial capacity as the Hegeman's head chef, Jeanette and another cook provide three meals a day for 55 clients.

with critical information on clients, thereby making it easier for them to provide services and to report on their work.

## The Challenge of Street Homelessness

New York City is one of the few places in the country that has a legal right to shelter, allowing anyone in need of shelter to obtain it. The impact of meeting this legal commitment is illustrated by the rates of street homelessness in other major cities. According to HUD, one out of every 3,013 New Yorkers is identified as being homeless and unsheltered. In Los Angeles, the rate is one out of every 285. Moreover, three out of every four people who are homeless in Los Angeles are living unsheltered—approaching some 33,000 individuals. In New York, that same rate is one out of every 25, or a little more than 2,800 individuals.<sup>3</sup>

Individuals who live on the street are New York City's most uniquely challenging homeless population to engage. Each individual found his or her way to the street via different paths, often filled with broken promises and exposure to dangerous situations, which makes gaining their trust more difficult.

The city's street homeless individuals wake up each morning after a night on the street to face a host of immediate problems—finding food, packing up possessions, and dealing with the weather—but many also face barriers that make doing these simple things more complicated. For example, street homeless individuals have higher rates of:

- Mental health and substance use disorders, reflecting the fact that most street homeless individuals are single adult males, who have higher rates of both.
- Medical difficulties and disabilities, in part because this population has a high percentage of people over 50.

These barriers create longer histories of homelessness than are generally found among families and individuals residing in shelter, and greater experience with traditional shelter settings, which, in concert with long periods of institutionalization or incarceration, increase resistance to entering a shelter. These barriers individually and collectively raise special challenges in moving street homeless individuals into permanent housing and in bringing them into the workforce.

What's more, leaving the streets is not easy. Street homeless individuals have traditionally faced a bureaucratic maze laden with obstacles to obtaining assistance with housing or accessing treatment for mental illness and drug use—and had no one to help guide their way. Too often those obstacles have contributed to disengagement and mistrust.



Ray, who was homeless for over 25 years, recalls his first day at the Prince George supportive housing residence: "So glad to get inside, I jumped for joy."

<sup>3</sup> HUD, American Community Survey 2015 5-Year Population Averages. Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR), 2016: Part 1. (2016.) Retrieved from <https://www.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/2016-AHAR-Part-1.pdf>.



## Street Homelessness versus Panhandling

People asking passers-by for money on the street, in the subways, and elsewhere in the city are considered panhandlers and, while some of them are homeless, not all are—and not all of those who are homeless and encountered on the street are actually living on the street.<sup>4</sup>

Predominantly male, panhandlers tend to have fewer ties to family as well as limited job skills and education. They may have criminal records, but panhandlers are nearly as likely to have been the victims of crime as the offenders. Some are transient, but most have been in their community for a long time. Mental illness can play a role in why people choose to panhandle, but the majority of them are not mentally ill, though many do have substance use problems. Both problems can make it more difficult to engage in regular work hours and traditional employment.

As a result, for many of those who panhandle, it is an occupation and a way to support themselves. It can be difficult to differentiate between someone who is living on the street and asking for money and someone who has a place to stay but panhandles to support themselves. The City is committed to engaging everyone who needs help, but panhandling is not illegal in New York City (except on subways and buses) and in most situations falls under First Amendment protections for free speech.

These protections end when panhandling turns coercive, with someone soliciting for money using actual or implied threats, or taking menacing actions. Termed “aggressive panhandling,” these types of actions are illegal and should be reported to the police by calling 911. For example, in part to deal with aggressive panhandling in Times Square, in 2016 Mayor de Blasio signed legislation to give authority to the New York City Department of Transportation to regulate public plazas, such as Times Square, where aggressive panhandling had become particularly problematic.

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<sup>4</sup> For a detailed and carefully annotated overview of panhandling and particularly its implications for police practices, see this 2002 guide by Michael S. Scott for the Center for Problem-Oriented Policing: <http://www.popcenter.org/problems/panhandling/>.



Mayor de Blasio provides an update on HOME-STAT at Tompkins Square Park.

## HOME-STAT: A Comprehensive Program for Addressing the Challenges of Street Homelessness

Recognizing the difficulties of bringing individuals off the street and the need to find the path that will work for each individual, the de Blasio administration created HOME-STAT, the most comprehensive street homeless outreach effort in any U.S. city.

A joint effort of the Department of Homeless Services (DHS) and the Mayor's Office of Operations, HOME-STAT represents an unparalleled commitment to finding every person living on the streets of New York City and working to meet that individual's needs. HOME-STAT has developed a process to coordinate each agency required to help these street homeless individuals and has built a team comprising canvassers, outreach workers, and NYPD officers.

HOME-STAT has doubled in size from 191 to 387 the highly trained DHS outreach workers who regularly meet each homeless individual and work to gain their trust and convince them to accept services.

Finding a way to address the particular needs of each street homeless individual takes time and resources. According to DSS data, individuals need an average of five months of intensive contact by outreach workers to move into transitional housing and more than a year for permanent housing.<sup>5</sup>

### Average Placement Time for Street Homeless Individuals

	Average Months to Placement
Permanent Placement	12.6
Stabilization Bed	3.6
Transitional Housing	5.6
Other	1.1
<b>All</b>	<b>4.7</b>

Note: "Other" includes placements such as nursing facilities and detox programs.

### Identifying Street Homeless Individuals

The first step to providing consistent services to individuals living on the street is knowing where each person is likely to be found from day to day. HOME-STAT locates street homeless individuals at a scale and frequency far beyond any other street homelessness program in the U.S.

Every day HOME-STAT staff canvass Manhattan between Canal Street and 145th Street, where most 311 service requests related to homelessness originate, as well as

<sup>5</sup> Source: Department of Social Services.



selected hotspots across the city. The information they generate each day is sent to outreach teams, which then work directly with the individuals identified.

As of December 2016, there were nearly 3,000 currently or formerly street homeless individuals known to HOME-STAT and on the by-name list. The formerly street homeless individuals are still receiving support services to help them stay off the street and either move from transitional housing to permanent housing or to remain in permanent housing. Of those on the HOME-STAT by-name list,

- 45 percent were on the street or in similar settings.
- 41 percent were in transitional housing, such as Safe Havens.
- 14 percent were in more permanent housing while continuing to receive community support services.



## Colin

MANHATTAN

**Housing:** moved from the street to a studio apartment in supportive housing

**Help Provided:** HOME-STAT helped end his two years of homelessness

### Client's Story

Colin spent nights sleeping on the steps of a church on Central Park West in Manhattan before he connected with a street outreach team from the Manhattan Outreach Consortium, led by service provider Goddard Riverside. Formerly a mixed martial arts boxer and personal trainer, Colin became homeless after a hip injury made it difficult for him to work and he lost his apartment. When he first began working with outreach workers, he had been homeless for about 16 months—a period that in the past would not have qualified him for case management services. However, under HOME-STAT, Colin was assigned a case manager who helped him acquire the assessments and documents necessary to find permanent housing. Colin eventually moved into a studio apartment at Capitol Hall supportive housing, also run by Goddard Riverside. A social services team continues to work with Colin to ensure he keeps his apartment.





Two outreach workers from the Manhattan Outreach Consortium join thousands of volunteers across the city in conducting the 2017 HOPE count.

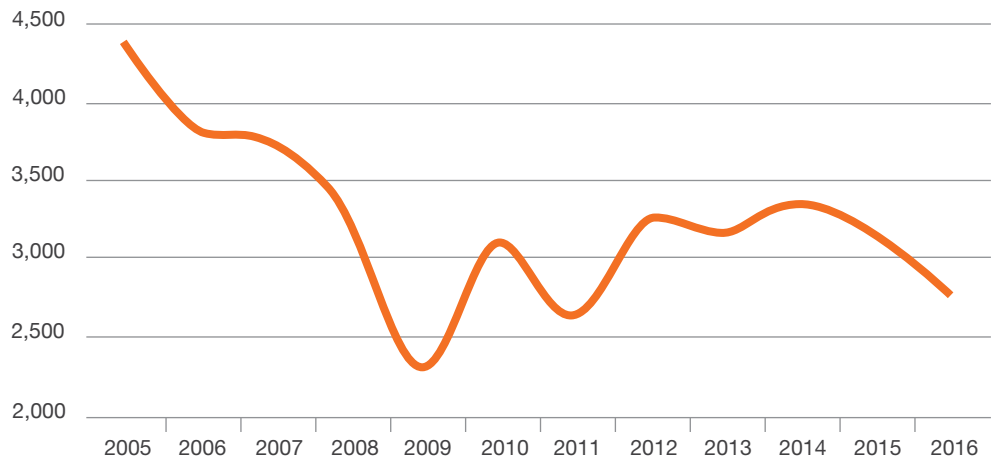
As a result of HOME-STAT's outreach work to identify and provide services to everyone on the streets in order to bring them inside, the number of clients on the street who have been identified and added to the by-name list has grown from 998 in March 2016 to 1,326 in December 2016. The expansion of the central by-name list allows the City to improve its interactions with each individual and helps social workers and advocates provide information to multiple agencies to better monitor clients' progress—critical steps in gaining the trust of this population.

In addition to the daily canvassing, HOME-STAT instituted a new citywide overnight quarterly count that enables outreach staff to confirm the locations of clients with whom they are already working and find new people who could benefit from the City's enhanced outreach services.

The quarterly counts are in addition to the biennial count of unsheltered homeless individuals that HUD has required nationally for more than a decade. New York City's count of unsheltered individuals—the Homeless Outreach Population Estimate (HOPE)—is conducted annually and is critical to accessing federal funding as well as providing an indicator of those who are most in need.<sup>6</sup>

In 2016 the New York City HOPE count found 2,794 people, a 12 percent decline from the 3,182 located in 2015, the second annual decline in a row, and a 36 percent decline from the 4,395 found during the first count in 2005.<sup>7</sup>

Street Homeless Population (HOPE Count), by Fiscal Year



<sup>6</sup> Generally conducted on one night during the last ten days of January, the New York City HOPE count can be delayed when inclement conditions, such as a snowstorm, reduce the likelihood of an accurate count, since many street homeless individuals seek shelter under such circumstances. This happened in 2016 and this year, when the New York City HOPE count was delayed because of bad weather.

<sup>7</sup> HOME-STAT's first ever quarterly counts this year found similar numbers for the street homeless population as the 2016 HOPE count, with 2,746 in the summer, 2,738 in the fall, and 2,535 in the spring.



The 2016 HOPE count also found a 20 percent decrease in the number of homeless people in the subways—the first decrease in seven years and one that comes after the first full year of a new collaboration between DHS and the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) that more than quintupled the number of outreach staff in the subways, from 20 to 111. During this administration, outreach teams from the service provider BRC also began to canvass the subway system 24 hours a day, every day.



## Encampments and Pop-ups

### How the City Creates Safe Conditions for All New Yorkers and Ensures Street Homeless Individuals Can Keep Their Belongings

Individuals living on the street sometimes create structures called encampments in remote or isolated locations such as under bridges or off-ramps. Much more temporary and flimsy sites called pop-ups may consist of little more than cardboard or a mattress in plain view as well as in remote areas. Neither encampments nor pop-ups are permitted in New York City.

Both encampments and pop-ups are addressed by the City in a way that allows them to be cleaned up while at the same time taking care to ensure that the individuals there retain any valuables, including paperwork, medicine, or other personal belongings.

To accomplish this, DHS works with other City agencies, including the NYPD, the Department of Sanitation, and the Parks Department, to provide street homeless individuals with access to social services, housing, and other assistance while also giving notice that the encampment or pop-up will be removed.

The homeless encampment or pop-up is then dismantled, and City agency personnel return to make sure that the encampment or pop-up is not reestablished. The City fully documents each clean-up and provides vouchers to individuals for any redeemable bottles and cans.

If you see an encampment or a pop-up being established, please call 311 to report what you saw so that City agencies can address the situation.



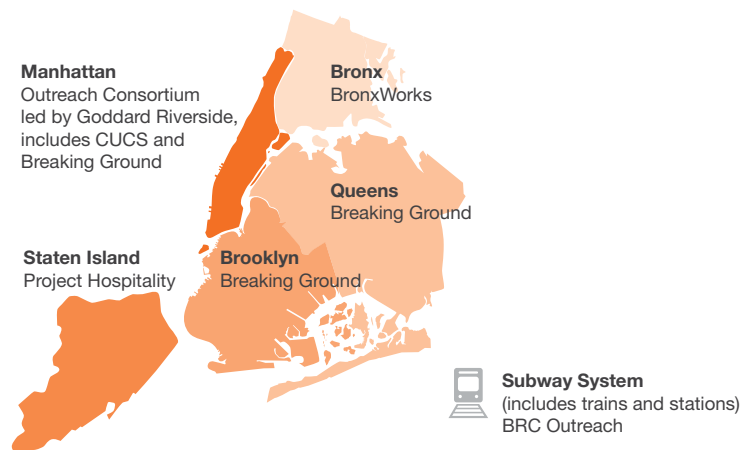
Outreach workers from the HOME-STAT service provider BRC speaking to a man in a subway station who was street homeless. Of the two men they engaged on the platform the morning this photo was taken, one agreed to move into transitional housing.



### Expanding Outreach

The 387 outreach workers who spend their days and nights working to build the trust of individuals living on the streets are the core of HOME-STAT. Hired and managed by nonprofit providers that cover a specific part of the city, HOME-STAT outreach workers move clients toward permanent housing through a time-intensive, trust-building process. When outreach workers find a street homeless individual, they actively engage that person to identify short- and long-term needs. This is a sensitive task that requires balancing the need to build or maintain a strong relationship with providing immediate assistance to people who can be wary of service providers.

The doubling of outreach staff has allowed DHS outreach providers to work with new clients—including street homeless individuals who do not meet the definition of being chronically homeless—and in new locations.



Thanks to new partnerships with 35 public library branches and nine hospitals across the city, outreach staff can now provide services to street homeless individuals who sometimes use these locations as de facto daytime shelters and were thus previously out of view of street outreach workers.

Street homeless individuals also use emergency room services at very high rates. Recently, one of HOME-STAT's service providers, BronxWorks, partnered with St. Barnabas Hospital in the Bronx to create a system for working with street homeless individuals who frequently use the emergency room. Hospital staff worked with the BronxWorks outreach team to find alternative resources for addressing their medical needs and treating their substance use and chronic behavioral disorders. The resulting coordination of care reduced the visits to the emergency room by these frequent users by nearly 30 percent, leading to a cost savings of \$729,000. A similar initiative has begun with Lincoln Hospital.

Based on HOME-STAT's initial success, the City plans to continue to develop these hospital-outreach partnerships.



## HOME-STAT Outreach Workers Alejandra and Tessa

### Case Study

Watching street homeless outreach workers Tessa and Alejandra do their jobs makes it clear that to address the complex, long-term needs of street homeless individuals the City requires the kind of one-by-one approach taken by HOME-STAT.

Both Alejandra, the team leader, and Tessa work for Breaking Ground, one of the nonprofit providers contracted as part of HOME-STAT to reach out to street homeless individuals. Alejandra came to homeless outreach after working with at-risk youth in college. She is also an emergency medical technician, a useful skill for this work. Tessa's background is in communications and grassroots outreach. Both women talk about the people they have helped and the people they want to help with respect, and they clearly recognize that each person has a complicated path. "The people we work with are incredibly resourceful and resilient," Tessa says. Alejandra agrees: "Incredibly resilient."

At a park in Queens, Alejandra catches the eye of a man and stops him with a quick, polite "Excuse me." Over the next twenty minutes or so Alejandra and Tessa maintain that same even, polite tone as they ask him about his housing situation and how he came to the area.

He says he has been homeless for about a month and had been to a shelter before but didn't want to go back.

Alejandra says she would like to bring him to a drop-in center. "It's warm," she says. "And they'll give you three meals a day. You should go. It's really cold." She repeatedly threads those points into the ensuing conversation, and he repeatedly says no.

Eventually he explains that he had just woken up in a nearby hospital, unsure how he got there or what, if any, medical attention he might have needed. He had been planning to spend the rest of the day in the subway.

After a certain point, Alejandra and Tessa could just give up and move on. They have already explained the services they think could help. He has refused services and has said he is headed into the subway—somewhere relatively warm on this very cold morning.

Instead they draw on the information he has provided to again make their case, one last time, for him to go to a drop-in center. "It'll be warm, and they'll give you three meals a day," she says again. "Do you want to go?"

This time he says yes.



Alejandra (left) and Tessa, two HOME-STAT outreach workers who engage individuals who are street homeless and help them get the services those individuals need to move into permanent housing.





Joseph, a tenant in a supportive housing who came off the streets through the efforts of Breaking Ground, one of the organizations providing outreach to street homeless individuals for the City's HOME-STAT program.





## Code Blue



DHS uses social media and other tools to help spread the word about alternatives to traditional shelter that street homeless individuals may be more likely to accept during extreme temperatures.

## Case Study

During weather extremes the City redoubles its efforts to assist people living on the street. For example, Code Blue is DHS's Cold Weather Emergency Plan for when the temperature drops below 32 degrees, taking wind chill into account. When this plan is deployed, DHS:

- Doubles the number of vehicles and staff conducting outreach in all five boroughs.
- Coordinates closely with emergency medical services and other City agencies, including the Police and Fire Departments as well as the Parks Department, to supplement DHS outreach team efforts.
- Focuses outreach based on lists of specific clients they have reason to believe might be endangered by these conditions and particular locations where other clients might be.

For their part, HOME-STAT outreach workers:

- Check on specific clients once every two hours.
- Perform clinical assessments and, when appropriate, coordinate involuntary transport of at-risk clients to psychiatric emergency rooms.
- Bring clients who agree to come inside to any shelter, Safe Haven, drop-in center, or hospital emergency room, as appropriate.

In 2017, the City will open three more Warming Centers around the city to supplement its existing facilities for use during a Code Blue.

The City has a similar outreach effort, called Code Red, for when it is extremely hot.

## Creating More Solutions for Street Homelessness: Transitional and Permanent Housing

To provide the path to permanent housing in a way that meets the varied needs of street homeless individuals, the City has developed an array of transitional housing options, each with its own mix of services. In 2017 and 2018, the City will build on the success of these efforts by adding a variety of new facilities. The City will open three new drop-in centers, bringing the citywide total to eight, and deliver on the promise to increase the number of Safe Havens. At least two of the three new drop-in centers will include a co-located Safe Haven.



Aristotle, a resident of the Prince George supportive housing program.

- **Drop-in centers** are community-based programs open 24 hours a day, seven days a week to provide homeless individuals access to services such as meals, showers, and clothing—but typically not beds. These centers can also provide case management services.
- **Safe Havens and stabilization beds** are more flexible and less structured transitional housing options exclusively for street homeless New Yorkers. They have lower thresholds for entry than a traditional shelter. Stabilization beds typically provide a short-term spot for street homeless individuals before outreach teams are able to move them to a Safe Haven. The City has opened 284 additional Safe Haven or Stabilization beds and plans to open at least 220 more Safe Haven beds in 2017.
- **Respite, Opening Doors, and beds in houses of worship** are typically used by clients who are working with drop-in center staff to prepare for transitional or permanent housing. Respite beds and beds in houses of worship are normally staffed by volunteers and do not offer case management.
- **Supportive housing** serves as a more permanent housing solution for many street homeless individuals. Designed specifically to meet the challenges faced by homeless individuals, supportive housing has a proven record of success and Mayor de Blasio has committed to adding 15,000 more units over the next 15 years.

### Knowing Each Client: The HOME-STAT Journey Map, StreetSmart, and Case Conferencing

To coordinate individualized service for each client, HOME-STAT built on years of outreach work by its providers to develop a comprehensive by-name list of all known street homeless individuals. At the same time, to guide the increased outreach work, the City created an 11-step journey map that details the most likely routes for street homeless individuals to more stable and permanent housing.<sup>8</sup>

At every point, HOME-STAT service providers need to be able to get specific client information to and from the City agencies supplying the required services. An array of technological and legal barriers makes this a formidable task.

HOME-STAT addresses these longstanding barriers through StreetSmart, a robust, up-to-date data system expected to be operational in the spring of 2017. StreetSmart will reduce outreach workers' case management and reporting challenges so they can focus on delivering services. StreetSmart takes advantage of the first-ever citywide data sharing framework to offer service providers and City agencies information to which

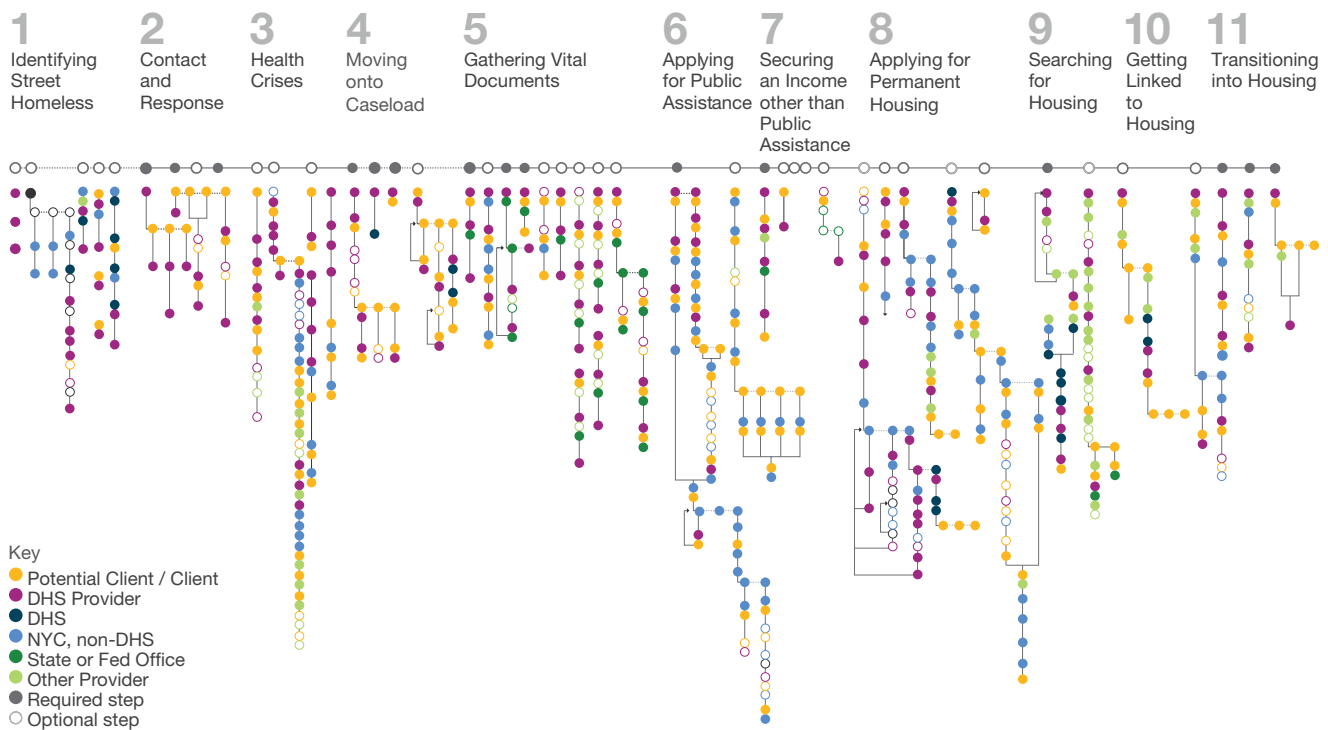
<sup>8</sup> The Mayor's Office of Operations conducted stakeholder research to document the process of securing services and permanent housing for street homeless individuals, following the best practices around Human-Centered Design. The Mayor's Office of Operations' Design and Product Team determined the most likely client paths for the journey map through interviews with 37 government staff across six City agencies and one State agency, as well as 18 program staff from five homeless service providers. The Operations researchers also shadowed 10 outreach workers from six different teams.



they did not previously have access, while assiduously protecting the privacy of clients’ personal information.

HOME-STAT’s by-name list is a powerful tool for identifying common bottlenecks and other system-wide issues that affect multiple clients. Once identified, these bottlenecks serve as the basis for discussions at monthly and bimonthly case conferences that bring together service providers and staff from a variety of City agencies to improve existing processes, coordinate across agencies, and accelerate a client’s journey toward housing.

**NYC HOME-STAT**  
Client Journey



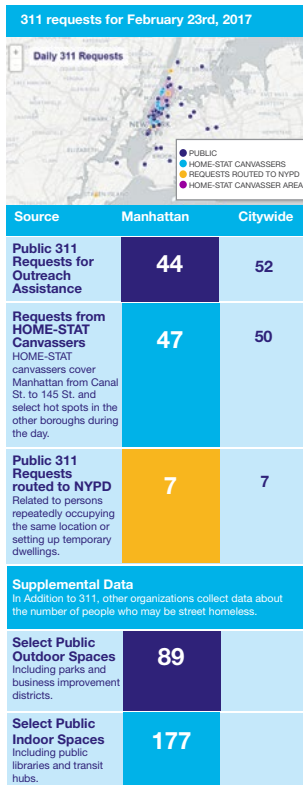
These case conferences include three integrated components:

- A discussion of representative cases that highlight common challenges.
- The development and implementation of system-wide enhancements to address those challenges.
- The analysis of data from the overall by-name caseload to track both the progress of individual clients and the performance of HOME-STAT overall.

HOME-STAT also brings together commissioners from various agencies—ranging from



A common area in the Schermerhorn supportive housing facility, which serves individuals who were formerly homeless and provides affordable housing for community residents who meet the project's income guidelines.



A sample of HOME-STAT's daily online dashboard, which includes a record of public 311 requests. Anyone can use 311 to request assistance for people who may be homeless and living on the streets or in other public places. Note that multiple requests could be made about one person and that a single request could cover more than one person.

NYC Health + Hospitals and the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene to the Department of Correction and the Fire Department—on a quarterly basis to collaborate, coordinate, and troubleshoot efforts to address street homelessness.

### Transparency and Accountability to New Yorkers: Public Dashboards

The data generated by the daily efforts of HOME-STAT canvassers and outreach workers and public 311 service requests, as well as the information collected in the quarterly counts, is brought together and published on a daily basis on the HOME-STAT website ([www.nyc.gov/homestat](http://www.nyc.gov/homestat)). This detailed, constantly updated data provides transparency and public accountability about the state of street homelessness in the city.

The data is presented on a set of daily, monthly, and quarterly dashboards. The daily dashboard includes counts by data source and maps 311 service requests to show where each person was seen. The monthly dashboard provides aggregated demographic data and information on the progress outreach providers have made in placing street homeless individuals in transitional and permanent housing. The quarterly count is detailed by borough and features a map similar to the one used for the daily count.

### Creating a Strong Basis for Future Success

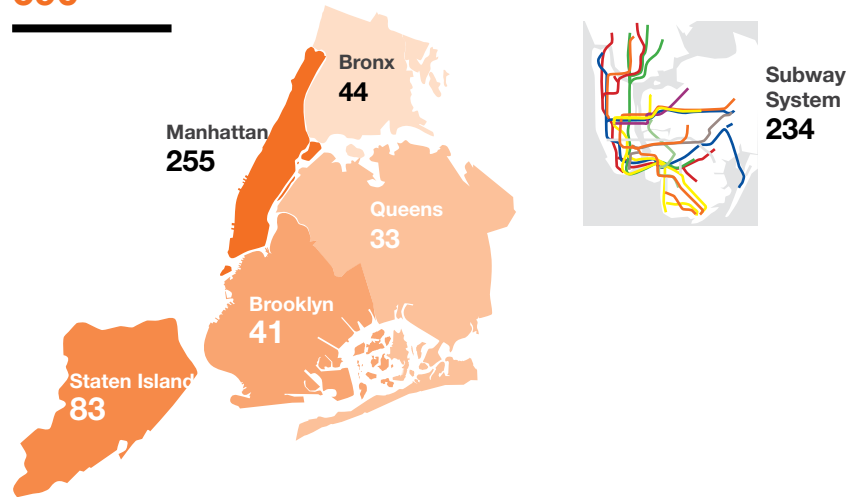
In its first nine months, HOME-STAT has laid the groundwork for further success in helping bring individuals off the street. After its launch in 2016, the City was able to bring 690 men and women off the street from all the five boroughs.



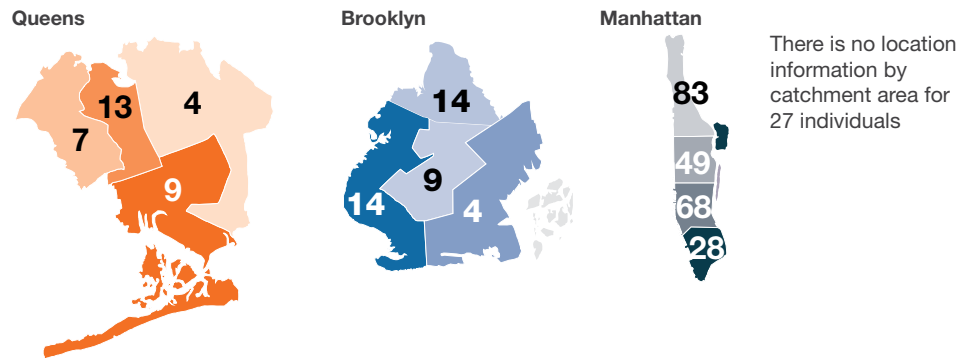
Location of HOME-STAT Clients off the Street and Still in Placement in 2016

Citywide Total

**690**



Quadrant Areas



Source: Department of Social Services.

This success was possible because through HOME-STAT the City:

- More than doubled the number of street outreach workers—the people who do the hard work of talking with street homeless individuals and gaining their trust—from 191 to 387 (a 103 percent increase).
- Deployed the additional outreach workers to engage more people on the street, not just chronically homeless individuals, and canvass more places than in the past, such as libraries and hospital emergency rooms.
- Increased the NYPD Crisis Outreach and Support Unit, which focuses on assisting homeless individuals both directly and in partnership with outreach workers and other City agencies, from 70 to 86 personnel.





- Opened more transitional housing to make it easier for people who decline traditional homeless shelters to leave the streets.
- Created a citywide by-name list of all known street homeless individuals and used that list to speed the process of connecting each individual to necessary services.
- Used the daily canvassing of key areas and the most extensive quarterly count in the country to ensure that everyone who appears to be street homeless is identified and offered services.
- Conducted regular case conferences with providers and City agencies, supported by the first-ever citywide data integration framework.

Through the efforts of the dedicated and hard-working outreach staff, and many others whose work supports them, the City is poised to bring more New Yorkers off the street and into safe and supportive housing.



**John**<sup>\*</sup>  
MANHATTAN

**Housing: Odyssey House,  
Randall's Island**

**Help Provided: Earned his  
trust on the street and got  
him into housing**

### Client's Story

The Manhattan Outreach Consortium (MOC), a street outreach team of community-based organizations funded by DHS, encountered John on the streets in December 2014. John frequently used emergency rooms at St. Luke's and Mount Sinai hospitals as well as various detox and rehab programs over the years. In the past he had also been placed in Safe Havens for three- to six-month periods but always returned to the street.

The consortium's Center for Urban Community Services outreach team consistently offered John placement options, which he declined. Then, in the fall of 2016, John had a heart-related health scare and, shortly thereafter, he contacted the outreach team to express interest in treatment. Years of continued effort by the MOC team paid off: John trusted the team members to assist him when he was ready to take the first step.

John completed an in-patient detox program and was placed at Odyssey House, a long-term treatment residence on Randall's Island. He continues to work with his outreach team, and he is completing his application for supportive housing. While it took John some time to accept treatment, the team supported him throughout his time on the street. His success demonstrates the benefits of consistent and repeated outreach to clients, even after repeated refusals of services.

\* Details have been changed to protect client privacy.



## Frederick\*

MANHATTAN

**Housing:** Prince George

**Help Provided:** Assisted in transition from the street to supportive housing

### Client's Story

Frederick was incarcerated at a young age and lost many of his family members while in prison, leaving him without any support when he was released. With nowhere else to go, he eventually ended up on the street.

While he was homeless, Frederick took classes to become a medical assistant. He slept in a parking lot, cleaned his clothes in public restrooms, and spent his nights studying. Then a DHS outreach team from Breaking Ground made contact with him and helped Frederick find stable, permanent housing.

He now lives in the Prince George in Manhattan, a supportive housing program operated by Breaking Ground that provides low-income housing with case management and other services for formerly chronically homeless individuals. Frederick is thankful for his case manager, who provided the helping hand he needed to find a place of his own.

\* Details have been changed to protect client privacy.



Built in 1904 as a hotel, the Prince George in Manhattan now provides 416 units of supportive housing. Onsite services include case management, recreational activities, and self-sufficiency workshops.

Chapter 5

# A Reimagined Shelter Strategy





DHS sites, such as the Kenton Shelter in Manhattan, are not always recognizable as homeless shelters.

## Overview

The City’s primary goal is to keep families and individuals from losing their homes and ending up on the street or in shelter. When staying in a homeless shelter is unavoidable, it is the City’s goal to provide shelter in a way that enables homeless New Yorkers to stabilize their lives and move back into their community as soon as possible. For decades the City’s shelter portfolio has included a number of excellent, high-quality shelters run by responsible and outstanding social service providers. However, as the shelter census increased over the past few decades, a significant portion of facilities that were opened failed to provide a clean, safe environment with the social services necessary to help homeless families and individuals get back on their feet.

Over the past 20 years, the City’s approach to sheltering New Yorkers has made it challenging to provide families and individuals with quality shelter that is clean and safe, has onsite social services, and—when appropriate—is located in their community, close to schools, employment, health care, or houses of worship. These are exactly the kinds of social supports that can help families and individuals stabilize their lives after losing their homes, which can in turn help them move out of shelter more quickly. In contrast, routinely providing shelter distant from the communities in which children and adults lived before they became homeless disrupts these key anchors of daily life, particularly the education of children, making it more difficult to successfully transition from shelter back into stable housing.



In a HELP USA family shelter, a mother and daughter share a smile.





By transforming the City’s approach to shelter and thereby better serving homeless New Yorkers, the City will better serve all New Yorkers. This overhaul of how and where the City shelters homeless New Yorkers will help families and individuals continue to live near the neighborhoods they called home, in a clean and safe environment, while receiving the assistance they need to get back on their feet. The plan will allow the City to get out of 360 cluster apartment sites and commercial hotels, replace them with about 90 high-quality shelters, and upgrade existing shelters. When opening a new shelter is required to meet these goals, the City will use a new process for notifying neighborhoods about plans to open new shelters. While it will take some time to implement fully, this new plan:

- Is borough-based, so that homeless New Yorkers can, when appropriate, be sheltered in their boroughs near their schools, workplaces, medical care, and other community supports, if appropriate. Over time, this will more equitably distribute shelters citywide.
- Gets out of 360 cluster apartment sites and commercial hotel facilities and replaces them with approximately 90 new shelters—thus reducing by nearly 45 percent the number of locations where homeless New Yorkers are temporarily sheltered.
- Is proactive and client-centered and provides adequate and appropriate social services.
- Asks communities to work with the City to solve problems and find locations for new shelters, and asks all New Yorkers to lend their compassion and support to their homeless neighbors.

This new approach to providing shelter will help families and individuals achieve stability and move out of shelter and advance the goal of reducing the shelter census. It will take time to achieve these goals, but they can be achieved if the work starts now.

A former shelter resident (near right, with a case manager at the Kensington Shelter in Brooklyn) moved out with rental assistance from one of the City’s new programs, CityFEPS. She is now certified as a nursing assistant and is studying to become a registered nurse.





A graduating class of DHS peace officers joins the security staff for DHS shelters.



In January, DSS Commissioner Steven Banks, NYPD First Deputy Commissioner Benjamin Tucker, and NYPD Deputy Chief Edward Thompson (from left to right, at the lectern) announced that an NYPD management team will work with DHS to oversee shelter security. Chief Thompson led the NYPD review of DHS shelter security and now heads the NYPD management team at DHS.

## Key Accomplishments

Since taking office, the de Blasio administration has made significant improvements to City-funded shelters to remedy a number of factors that have, over many years, contributed to the poor condition of shelters. These factors include the long-standing practice of making per diem payments to shelter landlords without formal contracts specifying requirements for building maintenance, inadequate payments to nonprofit social service providers for the maintenance and capital needs of shelters they operate, and insufficient resources devoted to oversight of the City's shelter portfolio.

Some of the most important improvements include:

- Increased Shelter Security:** In 2016, the New York Police Department (NYPD) conducted a comprehensive review of security at homeless shelters. That review resulted in the 2017 announcement that the NYPD will manage security at Department of Homeless Services (DHS) shelters. This will include the standardizing and professionalizing of systems such as access control and surveillance, as well as staff training and deployment. DHS has also completely revamped and strengthened its existing reporting system for identifying and alerting DHS managers and the NYPD management team about security incidents in shelters. In addition, when the City needs to open a new shelter, the new site will have a security assessment completed by the NYPD and, when appropriate and necessary, will include community engagement staff to troubleshoot any problems as they arise. These measures are making both the shelters and the surrounding neighborhoods safer and more secure.
- Improved Shelter Conditions:** In 2015, the de Blasio administration created the Shelter Repair Squad, a multi-agency task force to inspect shelter buildings and repair building code violations. The work of the repair squad was expanded in January 2016, and the administration launched the Shelter Repair Scorecard to track the repair squad's progress and publicly report on the conditions of DHS homeless shelters. In 2016, the City and nonprofit shelter providers cleared nearly 15,000 violations in non-cluster shelters. City agencies also conducted nearly 16,000 inspections—an 84 percent increase from 2015. The number of outstanding violations in traditional shelters dropped by 83 percent in 2016.



## The Shelter Repair Squad at Work

### Case Study

Win’s goal is to provide safe, clean, and well-maintained buildings that promote the “Way to Win” and break the cycle of homelessness. Achieving this goal while managing the challenges of operating shelters for homeless families at 100 percent capacity requires innovative facility maintenance and oversight.

At Junius and Liberty, Win’s largest shelters, with more than 400 family units, Win received invaluable assistance from the Shelter Repair Squad, which worked in cooperation with Win facility staff to address deferred maintenance and repair needs at both facilities. In addition, the Shelter Repair Squad took on the major improvement of retiling the refuse and laundry rooms at Liberty to address a vermin problem, which emerged due to a previous lack of funding for extermination and preventive maintenance. This new tile greatly improved both the atmosphere and experience of the space for residents and simplified upkeep and cleaning tasks for Win staff. DHS has approved funding for similar retiling improvements at Win’s Junius residence.

— Jerry Mascuch, Vice President of Real Estate, Win

The City’s Shelter Repair Squad retiled the laundry and refuse rooms at the Win Liberty Family Residence.





DOE Chancellor Carmen Fariña visits the Flushing Family Residence to announce the Afterschool Reading Club, a literacy enrichment pilot for elementary school students living in shelters.



A graduating high school senior and shelter resident speaks at the New York Public Library celebration of his and his peers' educational accomplishment.



Laptops in New York Public Library totes were given to each of the new graduates.

- **Used Legal Action to Force Shelter Repairs:** In May 2016, the City announced that it would use legal action to force the owners of seven cluster unit buildings with 726 building code violations to make repairs and fulfill their obligations as landlords.
- **Got Out of More than 600 Cluster Apartment Units:** In 2016, the de Blasio administration announced that the City would end the use of cluster apartments and commercial hotels to shelter homeless New Yorkers. The City has prioritized ending the use of units with the most serious health or safety problems, removing 647 units from the DHS shelter portfolio. As the City moves to end the use of all cluster units, it will continue to prioritize getting out of units with the most serious problems that cannot be corrected.
- **Announced Actions to Increase Provider Oversight:** In April 2016, the City announced that it would bring all shelter providers under contract and rationalize payment rates for shelter providers. DHS oversight has been most effective when providers are under contract and adequately resourced to meet the needs of homeless families and individuals. Bringing shelter providers under contract will end the practice of paying landlords on a per diem basis and will give DHS more oversight mechanisms to ensure that all providers are meeting critical safety and service requirements. The City has also begun evaluating shelter provider payments to ensure that they are sufficient to fund maintenance and repairs, programs and services, and critical capital needs.
- **Significantly Increased Funding for Homeless Students:** In 2016, the City announced nearly \$30 million in funding for new Department of Education (DOE) programs to support students living in shelter. Dozens of studies have documented the negative effects of homelessness on children's education, including lower rates of academic achievement and higher dropout rates.<sup>1</sup> This funding includes \$19.5 million in capital funding to build new school-based health centers at campuses with large numbers of students living in shelter, and \$10.3 million to fund academic support programs during the 2016–2017 school year for students living in shelter, including: increasing DOE staff at shelters with the most significant attendance challenges, expanding afterschool literacy programs in shelters, and launching enrollment events at shelters for families with children approaching the kindergarten, middle school, and high school application process.

<sup>1</sup> Miller, P. (2011.) "A Critical Analysis of the Research on Student Homelessness." *Review of Educational Research*, 81(3): 308–337.





## Addressing Clients' Mental Health Needs

### Case Study

Mental health concerns are a significant underlying cause of homelessness, especially for single adults. Homeless individuals living with mental health issues face both the stigma of homelessness and mental illness, in addition to the challenges of their specific conditions. They are more likely to resist traditional shelter environments and more likely to have difficulty navigating the system to access housing and other benefits. At Project Renewal, we operate three mental health shelters on behalf of the City. Many of the challenges our clients face become ours as well, as we work to connect them to services and permanent housing.

Clients with mental health conditions are often overwhelmed by large or crowded spaces, circumstances we must take into account when designing our shelters. Shelter space needs to be secure and safe for both staff and clients, as well as calming and therapeutic. Finding experienced staff able to address each client's complex needs is a challenge, as is meaningfully motivating clients to stay invested in the search for housing when availability is extremely low and locating an apartment takes time. Many clients have challenges carrying out the activities of daily living and have difficulty advocating for themselves. In addition, the double stigma of homelessness and mental health problems can make it even more difficult for us to secure housing and community services on their behalf.

At Project Renewal, we do everything we can to address this stigma and educate the public. By partnering with occupational therapists, we offer clients an alternative to traditional treatment and an opportunity to learn practical daily living skills. Clients learn at their own pace and in an environment that feels more therapeutic. Still, with few other resources available for mental health care, more people living with mental illness are at risk of homelessness, and the burden of care falls disproportionately on the City and shelter providers.

— Mitchell Netburn, President and CEO, Project Renewal,  
which operates three of the City's 27 mental health shelters





- **Expanded Mental Health Services for Families:** As part of the mental health initiative ThriveNYC, DHS is adding masters-level social workers, known as Client Care Coordinators, to all contracted shelters for families with children. Client Care Coordinators will work with each family to improve access to mental health treatment to help cope with the stress of living in shelter.
- **Increased Employment Training for Shelter Residents:** The Shelter Exit Transition (SET) and Job Training Program (JTP) promote full-time employment and job training for targeted shelter residents receiving cash assistance. Both programs have been expanded.
- **Enhanced Daytime Programs:** As part of the 90-day review of homeless services, DHS ended the requirement that residents leave shelter during the day and has implemented new job training, recreation, and other support programs.

Shelter residents pursue training in food service through a Project Renewal program.





## The Road Ahead—Overhauling the Approach to Shelter

- End the Use of Cluster Apartments and Commercial Hotels:** The de Blasio administration is committed to ending the use of cluster apartments and commercial hotels to shelter homeless New Yorkers. Since January 2016, DHS has ended the use of 647 cluster apartments. Hotel rooms are more expensive to rent than the cost of traditional shelter; cluster apartments have been cited for poor conditions. Through this plan, DHS will get out of 360 cluster apartment sites and commercial hotel facilities currently used to shelter DHS clients. The move away from cluster apartments and commercial hotels to actual shelters will also allow DHS to shrink its footprint by nearly 45 percent, making it easier for the agency to meet the social service needs of families and single adults.
- Open a Smaller Number of High-Quality Shelters:** In the next five years, the City will, when necessary, open about 90 new high-quality shelters and renovate about 30 existing shelters to add capacity in line with the goals of this plan. The City aims to develop at least five purpose-built shelter projects annually for the next five years—yielding at least 25 new sites. Relying on purpose-built, nonprofit-owned shelters will help ensure that shelters are safe and optimally designed to serve clients, make efficient use of City resources, and provide capacity to meet the needs of clients with disabilities. As part of its new approach to communities, the City will make community space in shelters available not only to shelter clients but also to the surrounding neighborhood and combine both shelter and permanent housing in the same projects.
- Improve Existing Shelter Facilities:** All shelter clients deserve high-quality shelter and services to help them get back on their feet, so it is imperative that not only new shelters stand up to the City’s higher standards but that existing shelters do, too. To achieve this, the City will allocate significant resources to improve the existing shelters and services, applying an approach called Conscious Shelter Design, which is discussed later in this chapter. Over time, facilities will be assessed and updated to provide environments that meet high standards of cleanliness, safety, and livability; redesigned to provide areas for targeted programming and spaces that engage the surrounding community; and designed to maximize the City’s investment. The City will fund this through a combination of City capital and expense funding, as well as other funding mechanisms to support nonprofit and privately owned shelters.
- Implement a Borough-Based Approach:** A new borough-based approach will, over time, provide families and individuals with the opportunity to be placed in shelters near their home communities. Achieving this aim will take time; the City will phase in this approach over the next five years as new shelters are opened. Borough-based placement will create a more equitable distribution of homeless services across the five boroughs, allowing homeless New Yorkers to remain close to their networks of support—their work, their social networks, their houses of worship—at a time when they need that familiarity and stability the most.



A winter wonderland event for kids was sponsored by UNIQLO at the Boulevard Family Transitional Residence, run by Samaritan Daytop Village. The UNIQLO volunteers built ice slides and gave the kids hats, gloves, and long johns.



## Shelter Overview

DHS shelters are organized into three groups: Families with Children, Single Adults, and Adult Families (with two or more family members over the age of 18 and no children under the age of 18). Clients are housed in one of three types of facilities:

- **Shelters:** Buildings in which the majority of units are occupied by homeless clients and social services are provided on site.
- **Cluster Shelters:** Individual apartments in buildings that usually have rent-paying tenants in other apartments, with limited or no social services on site.
- **Commercial Hotels:** Operating hotels open to the public in which DHS rents individual rooms.

DHS Shelter Census, Building Count, and Vacancy Rate by Shelter Category

Shelter Type	Shelter Category	Census (Cases)	Census (Individuals)	Building Count	Vacancy Rate
Shelter	Adult Families	1,950	3,987	26	0.60%
	Single Adults	12,011	12,011	92	0.40%
	Families with Children	8,617	26,225	169	0.20%
Cluster Shelter	Families with Children	3,045	11,067	276	0.60%
Commercial Hotel	Single Adults	1,491	1,491	16	0.10%
	Families with Children	2,057	5,798	68	5.00%
<b>Total</b>		<b>29,171</b>	<b>60,579</b>	<b>647</b>	

Note: Data from the Department of Social Services as of November 30, 2016.

## Create a More Effective Shelter Approach for Homeless Children and Adults

It has become clear that a new approach is necessary for the day-to-day sheltering of homeless New Yorkers, regardless of the level of the shelter census and the ongoing strengthening of the administration's prevention and housing initiatives. This plan reduces the number of shelter facilities by nearly 45 percent and replaces shelter space such as cluster apartment sites and hotel rooms with a much smaller number of new shelters, located in communities where they are needed to accommodate local residents who become homeless. This plan will enable DHS to implement the new borough-based placement approach and finally end the use of cluster apartment sites and commercial hotels.

The City plans to get out of 360 existing locations and open approximately 90 new high-quality shelters over the next five years, including approximately 20 new shelters in 2017 and 20 new shelters in 2018. Three main factors drove the design of the new plan—census demographics, the need for replacement capacity, and the new borough-based approach.





A job fair at the Forbell Men's Shelter run by Samaritan Daytop Village connects residents with employment opportunities.

## Census Demographics

Projections for people entering shelter are based on multiple variables, including historical trends and averages across the system. The City anticipates reducing the total sheltered population; however, some segments of the population will increase. Over the next five years, the City expects an increase in the number of single adults in shelter but a decline in the number of individuals in families with children.

While the City's prevention efforts have decreased evictions and kept tens of thousands of New Yorkers stably housed, single adults often enter shelter due to circumstances beyond a lack of affordable housing. Untreated mental illness, substance use disorders, and a lack of employment for formerly incarcerated men and women all contribute to growth in the single adult shelter census. The City's success bringing individuals off the street will also add to the number of single adults in shelter. This plan assumes that the single adult census will increase at about the annual rate it has increased over the past decade and that the adult family census will also grow for similar reasons. These projections take into account the Mayor's unprecedented commitment to provide 15,000 units of supportive housing.

The City's plan assumes that exits from shelter will continue to rise because of increased use of rental assistance, housing placements, and the availability of supportive housing. Assuming no changes to the larger economic and housing market dynamics and no change to State and federal support for rental assistance or homeless services, the City's projections are that its efforts over the next five years will help reduce the shelter population by 2,500 people.

## Replacement Capacity

This plan enables the City to meet its commitment to end the use of cluster apartments and hotel rooms to shelter homeless New Yorkers. The City must also plan to replace existing traditional shelters that have problems that cannot be remedied or financial requirements that cannot be met, for example, shelters that require such a high level of capital investment to repair or maintain that opening a new shelter would be more cost effective for the City than repairing the building. This is described in greater detail later in this chapter.

## Borough-Based Approach

Borough-based shelter placement is a new approach that will, over time, enable DHS to offer shelter placements for homeless families and individuals in their home borough. This approach will create a more equitable distribution of homeless services across the city, allowing homeless New Yorkers to remain in their communities and close to their networks of support—their work, their social networks, their houses of worship—at a time when they need that support and stability most. This is better for families and better for communities. The borough-based approach is described in greater detail later in this chapter.



It's story time at a shelter library for kids.

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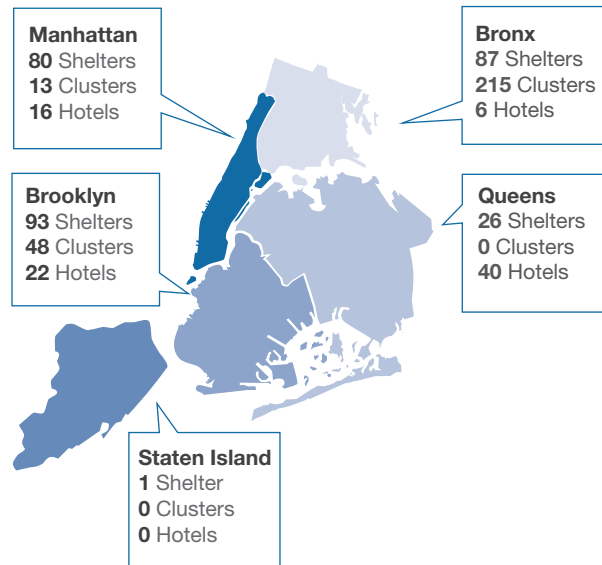
## End the Use of Cluster Apartments and Commercial Hotels

The City is committed to finally ending the broken system that for too many years relied on cluster apartments (in buildings with rent-paying tenants in other apartments) and commercial hotels. Currently about 11,000 men, women, and children live in about 3,000 cluster apartments; another 7,500 reside in individual rooms rented in approximately 80 commercial hotels. That is more than 18,000 of the total of 60,000 people in DHS shelters living under these less than ideal conditions.

Hotel rooms are more expensive to rent than the cost of staying in traditional shelters, while cluster apartments have poor conditions. Additionally, because cluster sites and commercial hotels do not have adequate space for onsite social services, and families and individuals living in cluster apartments are largely isolated, it is much more difficult to provide them the services they need to get back on their feet. The move away from cluster apartments and hotels to actual shelters will allow DHS to shrink its footprint, making it easier for the agency to meet the service needs of these families and single adults.

There are currently 273 shelter programs that span 647 buildings across all five boroughs, including more than 350 cluster buildings and hotels.

This plan will shrink our footprint by **ending the use of all cluster buildings and hotels citywide.**



New shelters will serve as replacement capacity to enable DHS to achieve these goals. In addition, replacing cluster site apartments and commercial hotel rooms with a smaller number of new shelters will expand the number of units and beds DHS has that are accessible for adults and children with disabilities—a critical goal for the City.



For the cluster apartments in particular, as replacement capacity comes on line, DHS will:

- Continue to get out of units that are in very poor condition:

In 2016, the City prioritized ending the use of units with serious health or safety problems and removed 647 units from the shelter portfolio. In 2017, the City will continue to remove the least viable cluster apartments from the portfolio while new shelters open—this may include units in buildings with poor conditions or units run by providers not meeting the standards set by DHS.

- Convert units to rental apartments or high-quality shelter:

For cluster apartments that meet safety requirements, the City will continue to work with landlords to upgrade and convert those units into permanent housing for formerly homeless New Yorkers. This year the City began to notify landlords of its intent to do this for over 400 existing cluster apartments.

For other cluster apartments, particularly in buildings in which DHS clients occupy a vast majority of the total apartments, the City will evaluate the location to determine if it is suitable to be converted into a new shelter with social services and security on site. To this end, DHS released two procurements over the past year to replace the deficient providers of over 900 cluster units with new higher quality providers. Some new providers will upgrade and convert a portion of these units to permanent housing; other locations will be renovated and operated as high-quality shelters that are clean and safe and have social services on site.

### **Opening a Smaller Number of High-Quality Shelters**

On a parallel track with getting out of 360 locations used as shelter, DHS will open approximately 90 new shelter facilities over the next five years and expand capacity at approximately 30 existing shelters over the next seven years.

### **Open New Purpose-Built Shelters**

Relying on purpose-built, nonprofit-owned shelters will help to ensure that shelters are safe, are optimally designed to serve clients, make efficient use of City resources, and provide capacity that can meet the needs of clients with disabilities. The City will approve at least five purpose-built shelter projects annually for the next five years—ultimately yielding at least 25 new sites.

To advance in this new direction, the City has sought guidance from several organizations currently rethinking how best to deliver shelter and the related client services. Organizations such as Gateway Housing, Citizens Housing Planning Council (CHPC), and other forward-thinking community-based organizations are developing innovative models of what shelter can and should be. Building on this great work,



the City will prioritize projects that meet Conscious Shelter Design principles aimed at transforming the physical design, service provision, and community engagement practices of shelters across the city.

Over the next two years, the City will spur shelter development by removing barriers to nonprofit ownership of purpose-built shelters, for instance, by establishing mechanisms to help nonprofit partners finance large-scale capital projects and by expediting the shelter approval process to meet the realities of the real estate market.

As part of its new compact with communities and the increased development of purpose-built shelter, the City will prioritize local neighborhoods' needs by making community space available not only to shelter clients but also to the surrounding neighborhood, and by combining shelter and permanent housing in the same projects.

### **Expand the Capacity of Existing Shelter Sites**

To reduce the need for new shelter sites, the City has identified approximately 30 underutilized shelter sites that can be renovated to add an average of 108 beds in single adult shelters or 62 units in family shelters, consistent with local law requirements. This investment will also offer opportunities to add accessible units and beds to better address the needs of shelter clients with disabilities.

Renovation of the first sites will begin in 2018 and take place on a rolling basis over the next seven years. To facilitate the process, the City will open 12 new shelter locations for families and single adults to serve as temporary accommodation space while the sites are under construction.

In addition to building new shelters and expanding capacity at existing shelters, the City will open new shelter sites in existing buildings that meet the new criteria, including the building's location, condition, and suitability for providing onsite social services and security.

While the City implements this plan, DHS will continue to have immediate capacity needs that must be addressed. This transformation of the sites the City uses as shelter will not occur overnight—in the short term, shelters may need to be placed in communities that already have a significant number of shelters. However, over time, communities should realize the benefits of a better aligned, more equitable system.



## Improved Services

The face of homelessness is different today. In the past, “shelter” meant a bed for the night. Now “shelter” must also encompass the services needed to help diverse populations find employment and maintain stable lives. The City’s shelter portfolio includes dozens of high-quality, dedicated social service providers that day in and day out meet their clients’ needs. To better support these providers and insure all DHS clients receive appropriate social services while in shelter, the City will:

- **Raise the bar for providers and encourage new high-quality providers to become shelter providers.** Establishing new standards for service providers will increase the number of contract-based organizations with a mission focused on providing quality services and care to the homeless population.
- **Expand public-private partnerships.** Partnering with community organizations that have shown considerable interest in engaging shelter residents in educational and employment activities will increase the effectiveness of these programs.
- **Standardize training and expand placement of highly trained professionals in every shelter.** Ensuring that properly trained social workers and other graduate-level professionals are available at each shelter is vital to the effective functioning of the entire DHS portfolio.
- **Deploy evidence-based interventions.** Partnering with social service researchers and providers that have made a demonstrated difference in other states and cities will inform new interventions in City shelters.
- **Put data to work.** Developing a holistic plan to use and manage data more effectively across providers and City agencies and increase transparency to the public will raise the quality of shelter services and conditions and help drive meaningful results.



## Conscious Shelter Design

### Guiding Principles

- ✓ Provide a Clean, Safe, and Livable Environment for every client in shelter.
- ✓ Create Targeted Programming to help clients build life skills.
- ✓ Build an Active and Productive Space to enhance programming.
- ✓ Ensure Positive Community Integration with shelters.
- ✓ Improve Resource Efficiency to maximize City investments.

These five principles represent the shared goals of the City and the community-based provider leaders operating contracted shelters today. These principles will be the lens through which shelter development is viewed and prioritized.

Mayor de Blasio, Deputy Mayor Herminia Palacio, First Lady Chirlane McCray, and DSS Commissioner Steven Banks visit the Bellevue Men's Shelter. DHS is redesigning and upgrading the shelter to better serve the clients, staff, and community.

The City will look to innovative, creative, and experienced leaders in the homeless service community for support and guidance in developing a new path forward on many new and existing properties used for shelter. Building on existing standards and the work of Gateway Housing, Citizens Housing Planning Council (CHPC), and other forward-thinking community-based organizations, the City will prioritize projects designed to meet a new set of principles called Conscious Shelter Design (CSD). This concept concentrates on improving shelters holistically—including both the physical space and the services.

### Proof of Concept at Bellevue

Surroundings have an enormous impact on mood, behavior, and success. To better support homeless New Yorkers, Conscious Shelter Design calls for changing the physical environment of existing DHS assets. DHS has already taken the first step in this direction with the redesign and upgrade of the Bellevue Men's Shelter in Manhattan—a former psychiatric hospital built in 1930 that has been in poor condition, has had security challenges, is home to a large number of residents, and has been unpopular with the community. When the renovation of the Bellevue Shelter is complete, its residents should experience the benefits of a secure, well-maintained facility that is better able to accommodate their needs and better integrated with the surrounding community. Likewise, improved onsite services are being implemented to engage clients during the day, including employment and recreation programs.







## Implement a Borough-Based Approach

Homeless families and individuals come from every single community district across the city, and a citywide solution is required in order to address homelessness head on. The City’s new plan for borough-based shelter placement will, over time, enable DHS to shelter families and individuals in their home borough when appropriate. This plan will keep homeless New Yorkers close to their networks of support—their work, their social networks, their houses of worship—at a time when they need that stability most. This is better for families and individuals, and better for all stakeholders.

Phasing in this method for placement will take a number of years. Like DHS clients, DHS units and beds are not “one size fits all.” Every night, the City’s homeless shelters are close to maximum capacity, giving very little flexibility for where homeless families and individuals can be placed. When families are placed in shelter, the most important thing is to make sure they have a safe place to sleep for the night. Unfortunately, where an appropriate room is available is not always where the family is from—and may move them far away from their community. Single adults may need to be placed in shelters that have specific mental health, substance use, or employment services, but because of tight capacity and where these shelters have been distributed over the years, single adults may end up being placed far from home.

To rectify this, two things are needed in the system: a higher shelter vacancy rate and a more equitable distribution of shelters across the city. The new shelter plan incorporates a 3 percent nightly vacancy rate—which, sustained over time, will give DHS enough flexibility to place families and individuals in a shelter that best fits their unique circumstances, not just where a room or bed is available.

The goal is not only to provide safe, quality shelter that keeps homeless New Yorkers near their support system and other valuable resources, but to do so while also weighing the concerns of those who live in the surrounding neighborhoods. As the City moves toward a borough-based approach, the de Blasio administration is committing to meaningful community engagement, including a clear framework for notifying communities about shelter openings when the City needs to open a new site. This is described in greater detail in the next chapter.

As with any plan, the projected shelter reductions and improvements could be altered by changes in federal policy or by an economic downturn related to those changes—but with greater investment from all levels of government, the City could achieve greater reductions. As the City moves forward with this bold new plan, the administration is confident that New Yorkers will lend their compassion and hospitality to homeless New Yorkers across the city, especially their own neighbors. Change will not happen overnight, but by working together, every community can do its part to make a difference.



## Richard

BROOKLYN

**He assists residents and clinical staff at Blake Avenue Men's Shelter**

### Employee's Story

Richard is one of three new peer specialists hired in 2016 because of additional funding at Blake Avenue Men's Shelter, run by Services for the UnderServed. Peer specialists such as Richard support the clinical staff by escorting clients to appointments, encouraging them to engage in treatment, and advocating for them.

Richard started out at the shelter as a security guard on the overnight shift before moving to the day shift. While on daytime duty, he made an effort to meet every client and often introduced himself to new clients before they had met with their case manager. Richard earned the confidence of shelter residents and staff while he helped the social service team manage more challenging clients. And he was there for clients with whom he had built a rapport—listening to and encouraging them.

When the peer specialist position became available, Richard expressed interest in the job; he had already impressed staff with his great work with the most difficult clients in his role as a security guard. With his own past experience using substances, Richard brought personal insight and connection to his new position. As a peer specialist, he endeavors to know all that he can about each client so that he can best assist them in their journey to finding a permanent home.



**Richard**

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Chapter 6

# Engaging Communities and Focusing on Public Awareness





# 77%

of people surveyed think homelessness is mostly caused by factors outside your control

## Overview

New Yorkers have great compassion for people in need: a November 2016 Quinnipiac poll found that 77 percent of people surveyed believe that homelessness is mostly caused by factors outside of an individual's control. However, while community members may sympathize with someone they see living on the street, they also may object when they learn a homeless shelter is opening in their neighborhood. Communities want to be consulted and have their concerns heard. They want to understand why new shelters are needed if the City is ultimately committing to reducing homelessness.

As the City moves forward with its new plan, it is entering into a new compact with communities across New York City. When a new shelter has to be opened, the City will ensure that any Department of Homeless Services (DHS) shelter plan considers reasonable neighborhood needs and community concerns. To formalize these values, the City is reforming the process for notifying community leaders of plans to open a new shelter. The City is committing to meaningful community engagement, a clear shelter opening notification framework, and over time a borough-based approach that more equitably distributes shelters across all communities citywide. By better serving homeless New Yorkers in their communities, the City will better serve all New Yorkers. DHS will replace 360 cluster and commercial hotel facilities with approximately 90 new shelters that are safer and cleaner and that provide better quality services to support homeless families and individuals. This plan reduces the number of shelter facilities by nearly 45 percent and replaces inadequate sites with new purpose-built shelters located in communities where they are needed to accommodate local residents who become homeless. In addition, DHS is launching an initiative to inform New Yorkers of the resources available to address homelessness in their communities.

### The City will do its part:

- The City is presenting a clear plan to replace the thousands of cluster units and dozens of commercial hotels with a greatly reduced number of clean, safe, high-quality shelters that provide the necessary services to assist residents in returning to their communities.
- Over the course of this plan, 360 cluster and commercial hotel sites will be replaced by approximately 90 new high-quality shelters, reducing DHS's footprint in communities.
- New shelters will be appropriately sited in each borough so that families and individuals entering shelter have the option to remain near their community supports, such as schools, jobs, and health care providers.



At the Flagstone Shelter in Brooklyn, a reading event engages families with young children.





Leaders of community and faith-based groups participate in a DHS event at Brooklyn's Concord Baptist Church. Attendees learned about Homebase programs, as well as key factors driving homelessness among women of color in particular. These include poverty, domestic violence, and a lack of affordable housing.



- Upon completion of this plan, the distribution and siting of the new shelters that were required will be more equitable, with shelter capacity available in community districts where it is needed to make it possible for homeless families and individuals to be sheltered near their schools, jobs, health care, houses of worship, and other critical community connections.
- When possible, newly constructed shelters will include community amenities, such as meeting spaces or childcare facilities, and combine permanent and temporary housing.
- DHS will notify communities at least 30 days in advance of when a shelter needs to be opened and take into account reasonable community concerns and input.
- DHS will form community advisory boards for each shelter to ensure open dialogue around shelter issues directly after new sites open.
- The NYPD management team is helping manage safety in homeless shelters and will work with local precincts to ensure safety for both shelter residents and the community.
- The City will also continue its plan to provide more affordable and supportive housing, which are critical to achieve the fundamental goal of reducing homelessness.



### Communities will be asked to do their part:

- There are homeless New Yorkers in shelter from every neighborhood in the city. Every community will be asked to help solve this problem.
- Elected officials and community leaders will be asked to engage constructively to help the City solve problems and site new shelters that are needed to replace clusters and commercial hotels.

### And families will be asked to do their part:

- Families should do as much as possible to help their relatives remain in the community and out of homeless shelters.
- The City will continue to provide assistance to help families assist their relatives.

## The Road Ahead

### To engage and educate the public, the administration will:

- Initiate new protocols to notify community leaders and invite community input when a new shelter must be opened in their neighborhood.
- Establish a clear process for involving local officials, responding to neighborhood concerns, and moving toward equity across the city in DHS planning for new shelter sites that are required.
- Map out a new citywide initiative in partnership with local community boards and elected officials to better educate the public on street homelessness, families in shelter, and prevention measures, among other concerns.



A visitor views the work presented at an event to mark National Domestic Violence Month at a domestic violence shelter run by Henry Street Settlement.



## The Placement of New Shelters

Since homeless shelters were first introduced in the city, some local residents, community leaders, and elected officials have opposed shelter openings. For as long as DHS has existed, administrations have responded to this community-based opposition by finding ways to avoid siting new shelters. For example, beginning 17 years ago, the City opened cluster shelters without notifying community leaders as a way to avoid siting new traditional shelters.

Community fears are largely unfounded. Scores of DHS shelters seamlessly blend into the neighborhoods around them. Over the past three decades, shelters have opened all over the city—posing no serious issues in their communities and garnering little or no attention. Indeed, they have become part of the city’s fabric.

In addition to prevention programs and transitioning homeless families and individuals to permanent housing, opening new shelters is the only way to end the use of cluster sites and commercial hotels—which the de Blasio administration is committed to doing. The administration has already stopped using more than 600 cluster apartments and, since 2014, has opened 31 new shelters. Most of these shelters were opened without controversy. In some cases, however, communities have demonstrated significant opposition to shelter openings.

At the borough level, the distribution of shelters is fairly equitable. Most boroughs actually have roughly the same number of shelter beds as people from that borough residing in shelter. The exception is Staten Island—with about 1,200 Staten Islanders



Shelter residents attend the 2016 Dads Matter Awards held at the Manhattan headquarters of DHS.





in shelters in other boroughs. The Bronx, however, has three-quarters of the cluster shelters in the city. And Queens has the most shelter residents in commercial hotels, with almost half of the city's total.

Because this is a citywide problem, homelessness requires a citywide solution. As the City stops using 360 cluster and commercial hotel sites, it will open about 90 new high-quality shelters throughout the five boroughs, prioritizing areas that lack or have a limited DHS presence. The City plans to realign DHS capacity to meet the needs of New Yorkers entering shelter in each community district. By providing these homeless households with shelter, services, and support in their own community whenever that is appropriate, the City will be helping families and individuals to maintain their community connections to stabilize their lives and move out of shelter as quickly as possible.

Neighborhoods now home to most of the cluster sites, which are concentrated in the Bronx and Central Brooklyn, should expect new high-quality shelters to open in their communities as the City ends the use of cluster sites in those neighborhoods.

Neighborhoods that currently have few shelters but a high density of commercial hotels temporarily housing homeless families and single adults, such as many communities in Queens, should expect new shelters to open in their neighborhoods as the City reduces its use of commercial hotels.

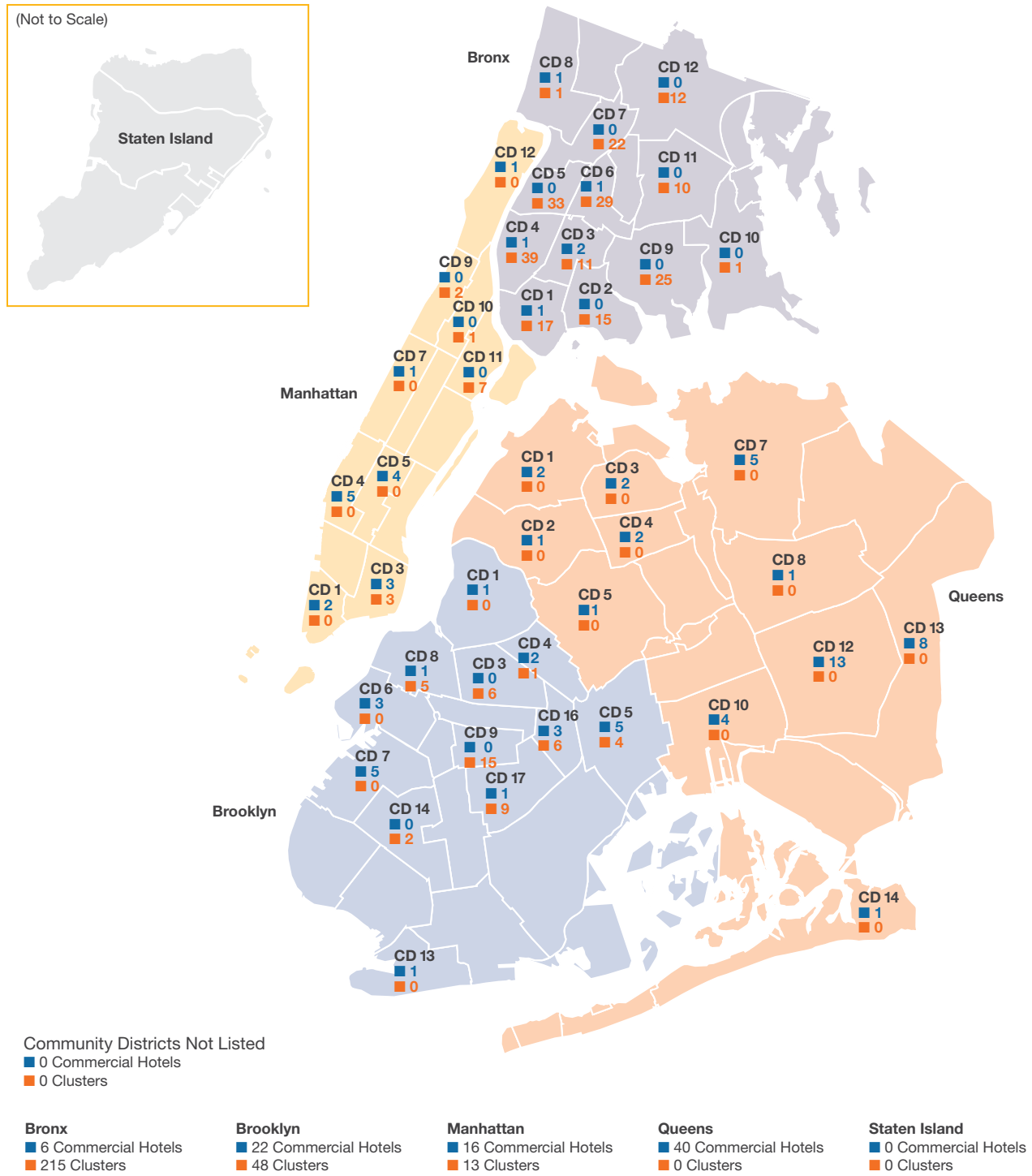


Community members attend a DHS outreach event in Brooklyn.



**Cluster Sites and Hotels Used for Shelter by Community District**

All clusters and hotels will no longer be used under this plan.



Source: Department of Homeless Services.





## A New Approach to Finding Sites for Homeless Shelters

To improve transparency and involve community members in addressing their community's need for shelter, DHS implemented new protocols in 2016 for providing notice to the surrounding communities about any shelter that needs to be opened and for obtaining community input. DHS also updated its method for projecting how many people will need shelter. Last year, the City opened eight new shelters.

The City's new process for locating new shelters that are required and engaging the affected communities is based on three core principles:

### Engaging Communities

In the past—admittedly including the early years of this administration—the City opened some shelters without notifying community residents. Since December 2015, however, coinciding with the launch of the Mayor's 90-day review of homeless services, the City has changed this practice and will no longer open shelters without appropriate community notification and engagement. Beginning in December 2015, DHS committed to giving communities advance notice along with an opportunity to provide input.

Even in emergencies, the City now consistently provides more than 30 days of notice to elected officials when plans are in place because a new shelter facility is needed. Two to four weeks before opening a new site, DHS holds at least one community meeting with local groups and leaders. And upon request, DHS has held larger community forums to discuss an upcoming opening.

Additional reforms will now include notifying local elected officials when the City rents individual commercial hotel rooms in their district to accommodate homeless people during the phaseout of commercial hotel use. In the 30 years the City has used commercial hotels for shelter, no regular notice has been provided. The City will also inform elected officials about the commercial hotel units currently in use.

### Making DHS a Better Neighbor

The administration has been customizing its response to communities' concerns and issues with specific shelters and it will continue to do so.

DHS has been addressing issues raised by elected officials and community members about a proposed shelter site. For example, based on local requests, DHS has:

- Dedicated beds in new shelters for homeless people from the community.
- Encouraged purpose-built shelters to include ground-floor retail space or community space accessible to neighborhood families.



- Invested in green spaces adjacent to planned shelters to ensure the neighborhood and the facility meet the needs of the new population.
- Expanded security inside and surrounding certain shelters.

For every new shelter that is required and being planned, DHS now creates a community advisory board with appointees designated by local elected officials and community members. Community advisory boards hold regularly scheduled meetings with DHS staff, the shelter provider, and the NYPD, when appropriate. Partnerships with and volunteer opportunities for local residents and block associations are often developed at these meetings. When a concern arises, board members know whom to contact and respond in real time to update DHS and the community-based organization that operates the shelter.

Community advisory boards have converted community ambivalence or opposition into support by developing compromises and effectively addressing concerns. For instance, in response to an advisory board concern about the lack of recreational space for shelter residents, DHS is working with BRC, the provider that operates the Jack Ryan Residence in Manhattan, to develop outdoor space on the roof where clients can congregate. At community advisory board meetings for an adult family shelter in Brooklyn, board members discussed their concerns about shelter residents' loitering in



Attendees share their questions with City officials and community members at a town hall meeting on affordable housing at PS 6 in Brooklyn last year.



front of a nearby deli and the lack of a designated smoking area. DHS worked with the shelter provider to establish a smoking area outside, which also decreased the number of curfew violations. And four new community engagement staff members were assigned to patrol the surrounding area, which has addressed the community's concerns.

### Striving for Equity

When Mayor de Blasio took office, the vast majority of shelters were in a small number of neighborhoods. To redress this imbalance, the administration evaluated the breadth of human services located in each community district citywide to identify underutilized areas where new facilities could be sited. While homeless families and individuals come from every single community district in the city, seven community districts have no shelters, and many more districts have few shelters. Achieving more equity in shelter sitings will take a number of years given continuing immediate legal requirements to provide shelter even as DHS reinvents shelters with this borough-based approach. As the City moves forward to accomplish this goal, it will constantly balance the immediate need for new capacity with the siting equity aims of this plan, which may require opening shelters in neighborhoods that are currently home to a significant number of existing shelters. Ultimately, the City plans to develop community districts' shelter capacity consistent with their residents' need for shelter, while ensuring that communities do their fair share.



## The First DHS Shelter Focused on LGBTQI Young Adults

### Case Study

Some studies have estimated that as many as 40 percent of homeless youth are LGBTQI. They face many unique challenges, from rejection by family members to specific health needs. For years the City's runaway and homeless youth shelters have focused on serving LGBTQI youth, but the DHS system was ill equipped to serve young adults aging out of the DYCD system and into DHS shelters. With that in mind, and in partnership with Council Member Ritchie Torres, the de Blasio administration opened a new DHS LGBTQI shelter in February 2017, with services tailored to the specific needs of LGBTQI homeless clients between the ages of 21 and 29.

Services include group counseling and workshops on safety and dealing with trauma; counseling to link clients to benefits, especially health benefits and documentation changes for transgender clients; a partnership with Callen-Lorde Bronx for medical services including HIV care and transgender health services; and an onsite psychiatrist to provide mental health care, assessment, and intervention and referrals to education services. Developed with feedback from advocates and services providers, this shelter is the first in the City to work specifically with this population.



## New to the Neighborhood

### Case Study

The historically working-class Kensington neighborhood in central Brooklyn's Community District 12 is diverse and densely populated. This polyglot area is home to a large Bengali population as well as sizable numbers of Haitian, Mexican, Pakistani, Polish, Russian, and Ukrainian immigrants. In December 2015, the district's first homeless shelter opened, providing 64 units primarily for mothers and their children.

Some 100 area residents greeted the news with protests in front of the site. They were upset not to have been given advance notice and not to have had the opportunity to discuss their concerns with City officials. Some voiced apprehension about students' safety at PS 230, the elementary school on the next block, and about the shelter's effect on property values. After worried discussion on a neighborhood website, several residents suggested organizing a group to welcome these families to their new home. Some of the protesters agreed to join the effort to help.

The Give Me Shelter BK group organized to coordinate packets for the newcomers with gift cards to the local supermarket and neighborhood information, including free kids' activities nearby. When shelter residents moved in, they received Christmas presents as the holidays seemed a natural time to extend a warm welcome. Since then the group has hosted a Valentine's Day dinner prepared for new residents by volunteers and festooned with decorations created by PS 230's after-school staff and students. For Halloween, the group solicited costumes, snacks, supplies, and face-painting artists for a party for the Kensington Shelter's youngest residents. The group has collected disposable diapers, baby wipes, socks, receiving blankets, kids' clothing, and toiletries and created online wish lists of shelter residents' needs. Area businesses helped equip a computer room at the shelter. Neighbors also lend their expertise by offering classes at the shelter—everything from music to meditation.

In the summer of 2016, the group initiated Operation Move Out to put together housewarming packages for shelter clients making the transition to permanent housing. The families moved into their new homes with dishes, sheets, brooms, mops, and more. CAMBA, the shelter operator, expects 56 families to move from the facility into permanent apartments each year.

Last year, the Coalition for the Homeless presented its inaugural Compassionate Communities Award to Catherine Barufaldi and Tracy Connor of Kensington and Windsor Terrace, Brooklyn, for the Give Me Shelter BK campaign. The Coalition is recognizing communities that have "...served as inspiring examples of compassion and humanity by opening their hearts to those in need, by treating their homeless neighbors with respect and kindness in an otherwise dark period of their lives—by extending the very idea of 'home.'"<sup>1</sup>



At the Kensington Shelter in Brooklyn, this family enjoys a holiday party with presents for all of the residents.

<sup>1</sup> [www.coalitionforthehomeless.org/compassionate-communities](http://www.coalitionforthehomeless.org/compassionate-communities)





Children under the age of 6  
comprise

**25%**

of the City's shelter population

## A New Approach to Public Engagement

Many New Yorkers are not aware that almost 70 percent of people housed temporarily in shelters are families and that children under the age of 6 comprise 25 percent of the City's shelter population. DHS understands that part of its mission must be to educate New Yorkers on the true nature of homelessness—debunking myths around homelessness and letting residents know what they can do to help. For the vast majority of shelter residents, homelessness is a temporary condition brought on by low wages and the lack of affordable apartments. Homelessness is not a reflection on a person's character or moral standards.

Consistent with its prevention-first strategy, DHS collaborated with a network of churches to spread the word about the successful Homebase program, which connects families with homelessness prevention services to keep them stably housed in their communities. The agency has expanded this outreach and training, working directly with other community organizations on how to connect their members with these services.

DHS recently launched a year-round public training program called “Care for NYC's Homeless,” inspired by the National Hunger and Homelessness Awareness Week. Through “Care for NYC's Homeless” trainings, DHS will foster 1) dialogue about the issues that lead to homelessness, 2) understanding about what homeless families and individuals need from their neighbors, and 3) education on tangible ways the public can help people who are homeless.



New Yorkers register for a DHS community engagement event.





Through this new initiative, representatives from DHS and the Human Resources Administration (HRA) explain the City’s efforts to fight and prevent hunger and homelessness. Presentations include:

- Workers from the DHS Street Outreach Unit discuss moving homeless people from the street indoors, along with the role of drop-in centers, Safe Havens, supportive housing, and the DHS intake facilities for single men and women, which are open around the clock.
- The DHS Families with Children Unit describes the process for helping families seeking shelter for the night, including intake at the Prevention Assistance and Temporary Housing (PATH) Office in the Bronx, interviews to determine a family’s resources and relationships to help them avoid staying in shelter, the types of family shelters the City operates, and the rental assistance programs available to low-income New Yorkers.
- A representative from HRA explains government programs to help buy food (SNAP), to provide free health insurance coverage (Medicaid), and to provide free legal services to prevent eviction and harassment.
- Trainers use a real-life example of a Homebase client—a single mother living paycheck to paycheck who stayed in her home and kept herself and her children out of shelter—to illustrate the program’s successful track record.
- Trainers inform participants about how they can assist in the City’s efforts. (See “How You Can Help.”)



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## How You Can Help

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You can help by informing yourself and spreading the word in your community about resources available to those in need.

## Community Resources

**Help your neighbors at risk of becoming homeless—because of losing a job or falling behind on rent—by telling them about Homebase, the City’s homelessness prevention program.** The program provides households coping with a housing crisis with individualized assistance such as eviction prevention, emergency rental assistance, job placement, financial counseling, and help applying for public benefits. You can find more information at [www1.nyc.gov/site/dhs/prevention/homebase.page](http://www1.nyc.gov/site/dhs/prevention/homebase.page).

**Help any neighbors who seem to be struggling to put food on the table by letting them know about SNAP, commonly known as food stamps.** SNAP provides food assistance to nearly 1.7 million low-income New Yorkers. Find out how to apply for SNAP online or at a community-based organization, as well as the location of nearby soup kitchens and food pantries, at [FoodHelp.nyc](http://FoodHelp.nyc).

**Call 311 or download the 311 app to report concerns about street homeless people.** Your report helps the City identify these individuals and offer them meaningful assistance. To learn more about this effort, go to [www.nyc.gov/homestat](http://www.nyc.gov/homestat); you can download the 311 app at [www1.nyc.gov/nyc-resources/service/5460/nyc311-mobile-app](http://www1.nyc.gov/nyc-resources/service/5460/nyc311-mobile-app).

**If you see a homeless person who is ill, in danger, or creating a dangerous situation, call 911 for immediate assistance.**

**Take a free course in Mental Health First Aid** to learn about mental health conditions that may affect people who are homeless as well as the resources available in your community. Visit [www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org](http://www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org).

**Educate your community, friends, classmates, and family about these issues,** and consider ways you can provide support, whether individually or as a group.

**Treat people experiencing homelessness with compassion and encourage others to do the same.**



## A Compact with Communities to Provide Notification and Consider Input

DHS has an open-ended Request for Proposal through which nonprofits propose to develop new shelters. When a shelter is needed and a proposal is approved, DHS will now take the following steps in its improved notification process to engage the community:

- At least 30 days prior to opening a new facility to shelter homeless New Yorkers or 30 days prior to the public hearing on the community-based organization's contract with DHS to operate the shelter, whichever comes first, DHS will provide notice of details regarding the site—including the social services operator, address, population, and capacity—to the local community board and each of the local elected officials, including the City Council Member, Assembly Member, State Senator, Member of Congress, and Borough President.
- At least 30 days prior to opening a new facility, DHS will offer to meet with community officials to seek input on the planned facility. Community engagement will be customized with the local elected officials, and DHS will participate in appropriate, reasonable, and agreed-upon community meetings.
- Following community engagement, DHS will consider feedback and make efforts to modify the proposal, where possible, in accordance with reasonable concerns raised by the community.
- At least 30 days prior to opening a new facility, DHS will notify local NYPD precinct officials regarding the site, including the address, population, and capacity, and a DHS security unit run by NYPD will craft a site-specific security plan.
- No more than 30 days after the facility opens, DHS will create a community advisory board (CAB) comprised of community members and designees of



Children's letters to Santa list their requests, which are fulfilled by Henry Street Settlement, the social service agency that runs the DHS shelter where they live.



local elected officials and the community board to ensure ongoing community collaboration in support of the shelter facility and to address community concerns.

- In emergency situations during the commercial hotel phaseout described in this plan, when DHS rents additional individual commercial hotel/motel rooms to temporarily house clients, DHS will provide contemporaneous notice when placement occurs during normal business hours to the local community board and each of the local elected officials, including the City Council Member, Assembly Member, State Senator, Member of Congress, and Borough President as well as the local NYPD precinct. If placement occurs after normal business hours, such notification will be provided during normal business hours on the next business day.
- Moving forward during the commercial hotel phaseout described in this plan, in circumstances where DHS rents more than 25 rooms in a newly identified commercial hotel/motel, or rents individual rooms at any given commercial hotel/motel for more than 30 consecutive days in a calendar year for DHS clients, DHS will offer to meet with community officials within 30 days following such use to discuss use of the affected commercial hotel/motel. Community engagement will be customized with the local elected officials, and DHS will participate in agreed-upon community meetings.

As the City implements its plan to get out of 360 cluster and commercial hotel shelter locations and replace them with a substantially reduced number of about 90 high-quality, borough-based shelters, as described in Chapter 5, DHS will continue its efforts to locate new shelters in community districts across each of the five boroughs and to engage communities with advance notification, dialogue, and an expanded public awareness initiative.

**Working with the Community on a New Shelter**

Here’s what to expect if a shelter is being planned for your neighborhood.







**Jasmine, a U.S. Navy veteran, and her daughter found a place in supportive housing through BVSJ after living in a DHS shelter.**

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