

## THE CHALLENGE

Thousands of people enter shelter each year without having benefited from homeless prevention programs. Some attempt to receive aid, but the assistance fails or is otherwise insufficient. Many do not seek aid from existing programs that might have stabilized or saved their housing.

Families who become homeless in New York City typically enter shelter after leaving a shared living situation, usually with immediate family members. Single adults generally become homeless after leaving an institution or losing housing. Most of these families and individuals are grappling with underlying issues that precipitated their housing crisis.

Today, the overwhelming majority of resources and programs that help those with housing instability only take effect after someone has become homeless. While ensuring shelter to those in need is critical, the thrust of resources should be spent preventing rather than sheltering homelessness.

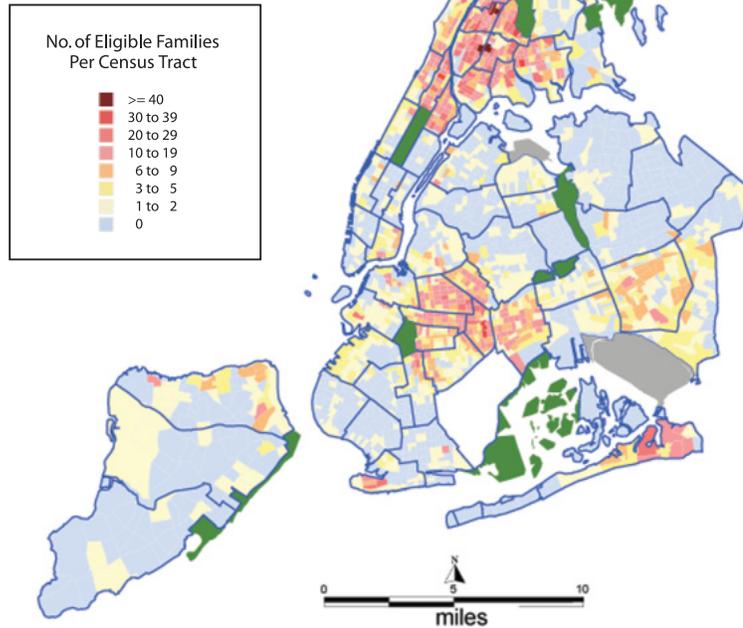
## SOLUTIONS

The initiatives outlined in this chapter shift priorities and services to homelessness prevention, primarily by strengthening programs, resources, and collaborations at the community level. Innovative programs that focus on helping landlords and tenants avoid evictions at housing court will also be pursued. It is at these community locations that the underlying needs of those at risk can be spotted and addressed.

Making this shift will require some trade-offs, as well as disciplined decision making. This will include taking affirmative steps to ensure that prevention programs offer meaningful alternatives to shelter services, using data and cross-agency partnerships to target resources to those at risk, and creating strong accountability provisions to ensure providers, agencies, and those receiving prevention services all take necessary steps to make preventive interventions work.

It is well documented that preventing an episode of homelessness costs less than sheltering an episode of homelessness – and the potential to generate cost savings is important. But shifting the city's reliance away from an ever-expanding network of shelters to expanded and integrated community-based prevention services presents the potential for achieving something more important: diminishing the trauma and dislocation that homelessness causes in the lives of too many individuals and families.

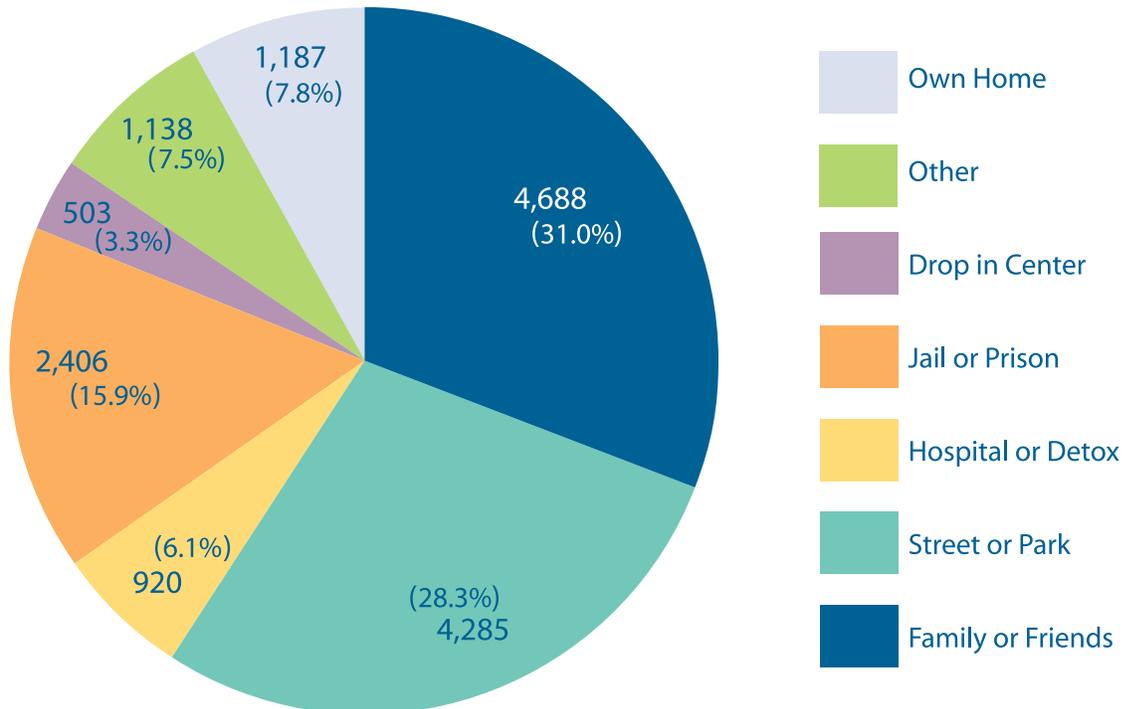
# Where Homeless Families Come From (FY 2003)



Certain communities experience disproportionate levels of family homelessness, which presents opportunities for targeted homelessness prevention efforts.

Source: Vera Institute of Justice and DHS Administrative Data

# Last Place of Stay Reported By Single Adults Entering Shelter (CY 2003)



About 40% of single adults entering shelter report coming from housing, suggesting community-based efforts may prevent their homelessness.

Source: DHS Administrative Data

# TAKING ACTION

The Next Step	Current Status	Taking Action
<p>Implement Community-Based Prevention Services</p>	<p>Shelter has often been the first and only assistance offered to families, single adults, and couples faced with housing instability. In addition, rental assistance, anti-eviction services, and general casework that may prevent homelessness have only been offered on a limited basis.</p>	<p>In 2004, DHS launched the Household Stability Initiative, a neighborhood-based homeless prevention program, in six communities that experience high rates of homelessness. An evaluation of this program will follow. DHS will continue to expand the program to reach more communities, individuals, and families with rental assistance, anti-eviction services, and other prevention initiatives.</p>
<p>Introduce Innovations to Housing Court to Focus on Homelessness Prevention</p>	<p>In certain cases, evictions are ordered because the tenant is unable to obtain proof of income and benefit documentation. There is little support currently available at housing court to prevent these avoidable evictions.</p>	<p>The New York City Civil Court will coordinate with public agencies to conduct case conferences and address issues that may result in an eviction. Community court models that stress landlord-tenant mediation will be examined and best practices incorporated.</p>
<p>Expand Aftercare Initiatives</p>	<p>High rates of families and individuals who leave shelter re-experience homelessness after losing permanent housing again. Aftercare services increase the likelihood for some to achieve stability in their new homes and communities. Historically, these services have been provided to a limited number of high-risk families, and only to those who have wanted them.</p>	<p>Aftercare services will be expanded so that more families and individuals benefit from them. These programs will be evaluated to learn the best ways to help at-risk households avoid another experience in shelter. Services will be mandatory for those who need, but reject, this assistance.</p>
<p>Provide "Brief" Legal Services</p>	<p>Currently, there is a "one size fits all" approach to providing anti-eviction legal services. This results in some tenants getting more anti-eviction legal services than needed, while others are unable to access these services.</p>	<p>City-funded nonprofit legal services will provide a more flexible range of services. Full legal representation will be available in some instances, while brief legal assistance (such as drafting a document or negotiating with a landlord) will be available in others. This will increase the number of people receiving assistance, while maximizing public resources.</p>

The Next Step	Current Status	Taking Action
<p>Include HRA Adult Protective Services (APS) as a Full Partner in Targeting Prevention Services</p>	<p>APS helps special populations, such as senior citizens, adult dependent children, and developmentally delayed individuals. At this time it does not link those deemed ineligible for its services to homeless prevention programs.</p>	<p>A joint HRA-DHS initiative will assist in preventing homelessness among APS clients. Also, at-risk individuals who are not eligible for APS services will be referred, when appropriate, to prevention and aftercare programs.</p>
<p>Implement Standards of Client and Provider Responsibility in Prevention Interventions</p>	<p>Individuals and providers do not at this time benefit from clearly defined roles and responsibilities that ensure that expectations are clear and best outcomes achieved, as prevention services are received and administered.</p>	<p>Standards of mutual responsibility will be introduced in homeless prevention programs. A principle will be established that individuals and families receiving prevention services must participate and take responsible action to the extent they are capable.</p>
<p>Enhance Client Involvement and Self-Advocacy</p>	<p>Despite the fact that programs and services are designed to meet the needs of clients, they have had little role in shaping those programs. This has led to missed opportunities for developing services that empower clients and take the strengths of clients into consideration.</p>	<p>Those responsible for creating programs will include clients as partners in program development and decision-making. This builds on the belief that when clients are able to advocate for themselves, clients and communities benefit. Opportunities to include client participation will be actively pursued.</p>
<p>Make Alternative Housing Solutions Preferable to Shelter</p>	<p>Most people who receive shelter services are homeless and have nowhere else to go. In some instances, however, shelter may be seen as preferable to an alternative housing situation.</p>	<p>Programs will continue to provide safe and appropriate shelter and services to those in need. Incentives that make shelter preferable to available housing options will be redirected into community-based prevention settings. Other options, including supportive housing, will also be expanded as a preventive intervention.</p>