



COORDINATE DISCHARGE PLANNING

THE CHALLENGE

One common avenue into homelessness is a “discharge” into shelter from another custodial or institutional setting. Data show that significant portions of the single adult population, in particular, become homeless in this way.

Adults leaving jails and prisons, for example, often enter shelter immediately after release or after a less-than-stable housing situation falls through. These individuals often have few social or family supports to lean on and face major challenges finding employment, staying clean and sober, and accessing housing or rental assistance. Taken together, these challenges are difficult to overcome.

Institutional discharges occur from other settings as well. Adults discharged from mental health facilities and hospitals routinely enter shelter. Young people aging out of foster care sometimes have nowhere else to turn. Too often, parents reunifying with children who have been in foster care do so in shelter. Many times, clients find themselves applying for shelter after being advised to do so or referred by a social worker from another service system.

While ensuring shelter to those in need is critical, the reality is that shelter is no substitute for permanent housing or the stability that comes with it. For many of these vulnerable populations, stable housing is key to recovery or successful integration back into community. Homeless shelters are neither equipped nor meant to serve this purpose.

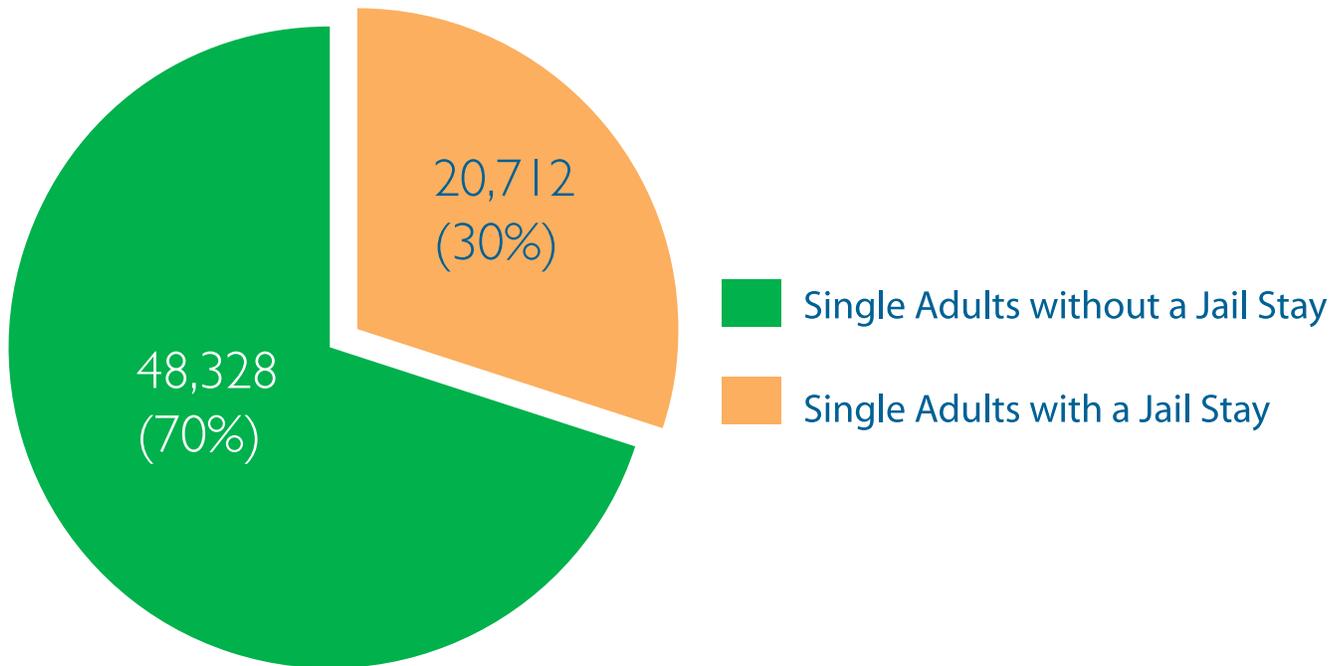
SOLUTIONS

The initiatives in this chapter outline new commitments and increased partnerships to reduce the number of individuals and families leaving one system and entering another. They embrace the notion that homelessness is an outcome that all agencies and institutions should work to prevent.

Promising new collaborations between the Department of Correction and the Department of Homeless Services, which focus on reducing homelessness and re-incarceration, will be expanded. A pilot undertaken by the State Division of Parole that helps parolees currently in shelter quickly transition to permanent housing will also be expanded. Ongoing work by the Administration for Children’s Services will continue to be strengthened to bring the stability of permanent housing to high-risk populations.

For many years, shelter-providing agencies have been discussing the high number of individuals and families discharged into homelessness. *Uniting for Solutions Beyond Shelter* replaces that discussion with the active participation of all key agencies and institutions needed to reduce this pervasive trend.

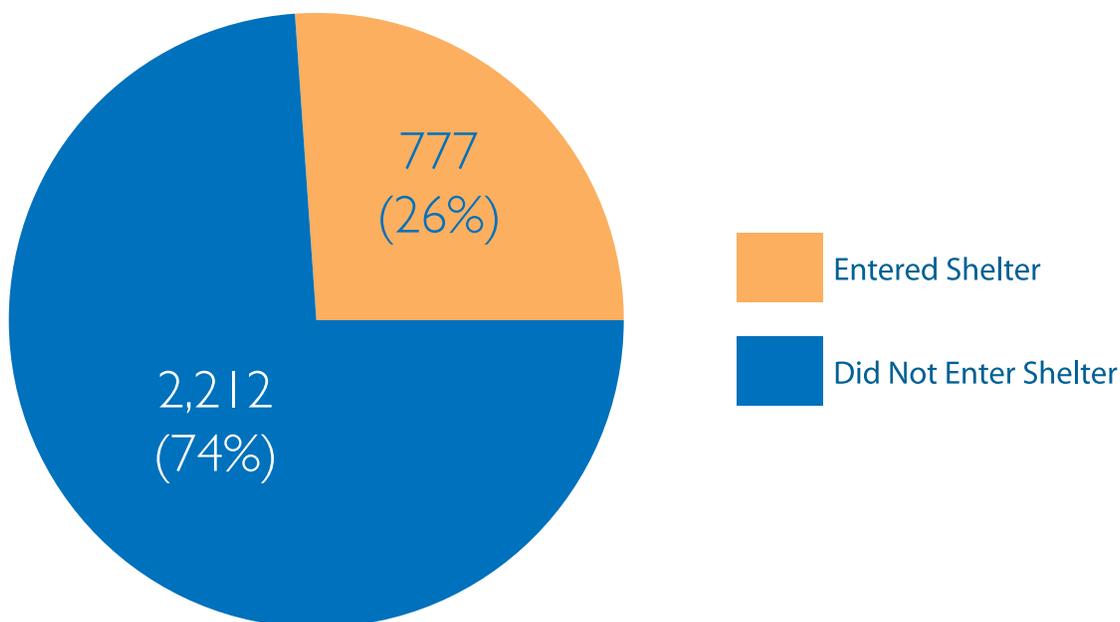
Adults in Shelter (CY 1999-2002) Who Had a Jail Stay (CY 1994-2004)



For the 30% of single adults in DHS shelters who had a jail stay, they had an average of four jail admissions.

Source: Dept. of Correction and DHS Administrative Data

Youth Aging Out of Foster Care Who Experienced Homelessness (CY 1988-1992)



For those youth aging out of foster care* between 1988-1992, 26% entered shelter at least once in the next 10 years.

*This includes youth whose cases were closed while receiving ACS preventive services.

Source: Study by Park, Metraux, Brodbar and Culhane (2004) using ACS and DHS Administrative Data

TAKING ACTION

The Next Step	Current Status	Taking Action
<p>Coordinate Discharge Planning for Individuals Entering Shelter from Jail</p>	<p>Many individuals released from jail enter shelter each year. Studies show that these individuals are more likely than others to end up in jail again. For many, a pattern of cycling back and forth between jail and shelter develops – at great cost to individuals and society alike.</p>	<p>New efforts are underway to prevent discharges from jails into homeless shelters and re-entries from shelters into jails. These initiatives focus on helping former inmates gain employment and substance abuse assistance, as well as access to other benefits or assistance that helps them find housing stability.</p>
<p>Coordinate Discharge Planning for Individuals Entering Shelter from Prison</p>	<p>Many individuals released from state prisons enter shelter each year. A pilot program between the State Division of Parole and DHS, which was started in 2002, helps parolees move from shelter to independence.</p>	<p>The current pilot program will be evaluated and, if successful, expanded. State and local agencies will increase the use of data to understand the size of the problem, increase access to resources that lead to housing stability, and form new partnerships that help ex-prisoners with mental illness avoid homelessness.</p>
<p>Coordinate Discharge Planning for Individuals Entering Shelter from Hospitals and Community-based Treatment Facilities</p>	<p>Some at-risk or homeless individuals in hospitals, mental health facilities, and substance abuse programs enter or return to homeless shelters after cycles of care. Too often, shelters are used as a discharge resource, yet shelters and homelessness do not offer the stability these individuals need during recovery.</p>	<p>Providers and treatment facilities will develop a range of initiatives to decrease the number of people leaving treatment facilities for shelter. An accountability and evaluation system will be created to monitor and improve results. Referrals, when appropriate, to supportive housing settings for at-risk individuals will be encouraged.</p>
<p>Coordinate City Services and Benefits in a Child Welfare Collaboration</p>	<p>Some parents with children in foster care are ready to bring their families back together, but need housing in order to create a stable home environment. Sometimes these families reunite in a homeless shelter, which does not provide the stability of permanent housing. Also, when young adults age out of foster care they experience an increased risk of homelessness.</p>	<p>Initiatives will help families reunite in housing rather than shelter so they can avoid the negative consequences of homelessness at a moment of family vulnerability. Efforts to connect teens aging out of foster care with supported independent living programs will also be pursued.</p>