



# MINIMIZE DURATION OF HOMELESSNESS

## THE CHALLENGE

Over the past 20 years, vast improvements have been made in shelter conditions and services. During this same time, the average length of shelter stays has grown. The average family today stays in shelter for just over 11 months. Nineteen percent of families stay for more than a year and a half. Sixteen percent of the single adults in shelter use more than 50% of all of the resources.

These longer-term stays are caused by a number of factors, including the lack of affordable housing. Historically, there's been a lack of urgency in helping families and single adults prepare for and secure permanent housing (although significant progress has been made by family providers). Some clients have also been reluctant to leave, preferring the safe and stable living arrangements provided at no cost. Pathways out of shelter do not exist for many who are challenged in living independently without supports.

All of these factors have created a need for the city to continue to build more and more shelter. After all, when the number of people entering shelter exceeds the number of people leaving, shelter expansion becomes necessary.

## SOLUTIONS

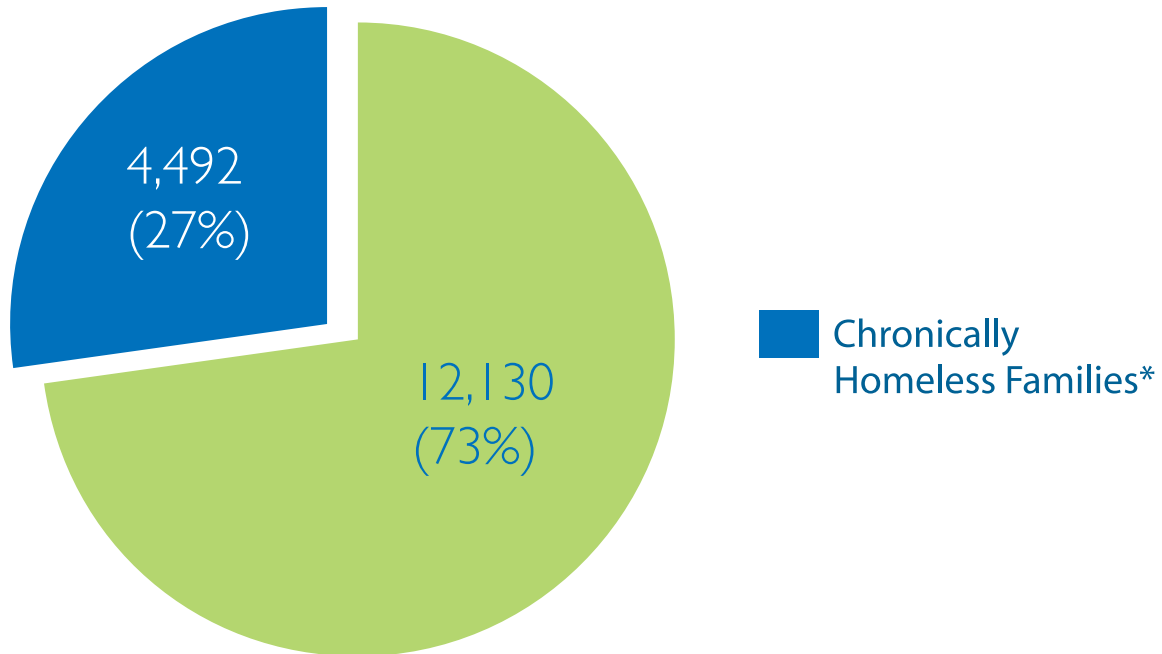
Shelter must again become a short-term and emergency intervention for the overwhelming majority of shelter residents. The initiatives in this chapter advance a strategy to reduce the average length of stay, while helping to prevent long-term shelter stays.

First, a series of performance and accountability measures will be strengthened. These include heightened standards for providers and fair expectations for clients to move with greater urgency to independence.

In addition, targeted housing and rental assistance and supportive housing resources will be made available to chronically homeless shelter residents in order to improve the speed and likelihood of their transition to permanent housing. These resources will also be developed for adult couples without children, for whom permanency strategies have not yet been developed. The city will also enhance its ability to intervene early with single adults whose homelessness could be averted through referrals to anti-eviction and other services provided by community-based groups.

Long-term shelter stays represent a failure on the part of public agencies, providers, and clients alike. While New York City will always have unique housing and affordability challenges, this does not mean that shelter stays cannot be shortened. Rather, a profound shift in culture and expectation in combination with the resources included in this chapter can help individuals and families more quickly overcome their homelessness.

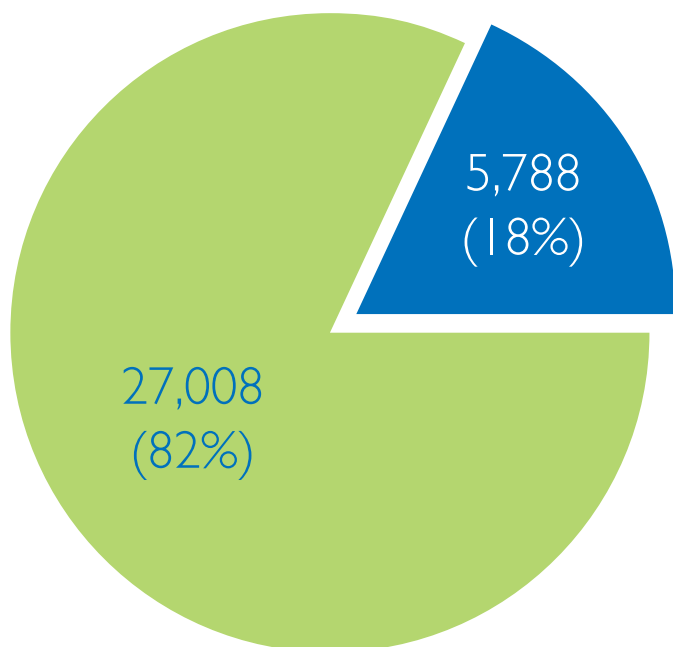
## Estimated No. of Chronically Homeless Families with Children Using Shelter Over the Course of One Year (FY 2003)



\*Any family in shelter in FY2003 who has been in shelter for at least 365 days of the last 2 years, not necessarily consecutive.

Source: DHS Administrative Data

## Estimated No. of Chronically Homeless Single Adults and Individuals in Adult Couples Using Shelter Over the Course of One Year (FY 2003)



\*Any single adult or individual in an adult couple in a DHS facility in FY03 who had spent at least two of the last four years in shelter or who is disabled and has spent at least one of the last two years in shelter. Incidence of disability was estimated using data from the National Survey of Homeless Assistance Providers and Clients by the Interagency Council on Homelessness, 1999 (NYC data is currently unavailable).

 Chronically Homeless \*

Source: DHS Administrative Data

# TAKING ACTION

The Next Step	Current Status	Taking Action
<p>Strengthen Performance Management Systems for Shelter Providers</p>	<p>Performance incentive programs, which encourage providers to help clients move to permanent housing, are already in place in shelters. However, the average length of stay continues to be too high.</p>	<p>Performance incentive programs will be enhanced. This will further shift the culture of shelters from one that focuses on providing services to one that focuses, first and foremost, on returning clients to permanent housing.</p>
<p>Ensure that Clients Assume Responsibility for Reducing Reliance on Shelter</p>	<p>Client responsibility standards – rules and expectations for clients in carrying out a plan for self-sufficiency – were implemented in shelters in 2003. Rates of clients leaving shelter for permanent housing, particularly among families, have increased since these standards were introduced.</p>	<p>The commitment to client involvement will be strengthened. The principle that no individual or family will be required to do any more than they are capable of doing will be maintained. An evaluation of the standards will be conducted so that quality improvements can be made.</p>
<p>Introduce New Tools to Track and Assist Help Long-Term Shelter Residents</p>	<p>Criminal histories, public assistance barriers, a lack of client participation, and other factors sometimes result in clients staying in shelter for excessive periods. In some instances, shelter staff have not had the resources or help needed to transition these clients to independence. The costs of extended shelter stays are high for clients and taxpayers.</p>	<p>New client monitoring tools will track long-term residents in shelters, enabling staff and public agencies to troubleshoot around particular cases. Shelters with unusually high rates of long-term residents will be examined and assisted. Technical assistance will be provided throughout the system to reduce long-term stays.</p>
<p>Prioritize Housing Resources for Chronically Homeless Individuals and Families</p>	<p>Chronically homeless people are, at times, unable to access permanent housing. This is due to an inability to qualify for subsidies, a lack of viable housing options for this population, or unwillingness on the part of housing providers and landlords to accept them.</p>	<p>Recent efforts to prioritize chronically homeless individuals for supportive housing apartments have been successful and these efforts will be expanded. In addition, efforts will be made to expand rental assistance for the population, as well as develop new models of supportive housing that meet their unique needs.</p>

The Next Step	Current Status	Taking Action
<p>Develop a Mobile Services Model to Bridge Transition of Chronically Homeless Individuals and Families from Shelter to Housing</p>	<p>The transition of chronically homeless people from the shelter or the streets to housing is extremely challenging. The transition itself may intensify the already profound service needs these individuals and families have. Today, there are no “bridge” services that can help ensure a successful transition.</p>	<p>A new service intervention will be created to help chronically homeless people before, during, and after their move to permanent housing – in order to ensure the placement is successful. Once the client has moved and stabilized in permanent housing, case work will focus on connecting these individuals to existing community-based services for ongoing care if necessary.</p>
<p>Assist Single Adults at the Front End of the Shelter System to Avoid Homelessness or Avoid Unnecessarily Long Stays</p>	<p>When single adults approach the city to access shelter, little effort is made to help those individuals who can avoid homelessness do so. After entering shelter, and even as an assessment begins, little effort is made to help those whose housing instability could still be addressed get necessary assistance.</p>	<p>Support services will be added to the intake offices for single adults. These services will help individuals reunite with families, obtain anti-eviction services and financial assistance that can prevent homelessness, and enter alternative residential settings for mental health or substance abuse when appropriate.</p>
<p>Develop Permanency Interventions for Adult Families</p>	<p>Increasing numbers of adult families without children are seeking shelter. Their needs are unique from other populations and their reasons for needing shelter range from domestic violence to eviction to substance dependency and other issues. This subpopulation falls outside the traditional framework of family composition; therefore, targeted case management and permanency strategies are underdeveloped.</p>	<p>Building on recent efforts to create a separate intake office for these families, targeted services and community-based resources will be developed to help them transition from shelter to permanent housing options. Client responsibility standards will also be strengthened.</p>