



# MEASURE PROGRESS, EVALUATE SUCCESS, AND INVEST IN CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

## THE CHALLENGE

The city's response to homelessness has been well resourced and well meaning, but has not always benefited from ongoing accountability and quality improvement efforts based on emerging research and existing data. Similarly, existing prevention efforts have not been evaluated routinely, leaving policy makers with little data analysis to target resources to the right people at the right time. Significant challenges exist in developing new prevention programs that effectively intervene with at-risk populations.

In addition, large amounts of useful data sit in various public agency and provider databases. Often, information about a specific person or household's public assistance history is in one database, their involvement with child welfare in another, and their history of homelessness somewhere else. Few efforts are made to bring these data sources together to create more holistic profiles of those at risk or experiencing homelessness.

A tremendous amount of interest exists in the academic and research communities to explore this information and assist in policy formation and quality improvements, but these efforts are not always coordinated or complimentary to new directions in public policy making.

## SOLUTIONS

The initiatives in this chapter recognize the central importance of evaluation and data analysis in creating effective programs and practices. They also acknowledge the often untapped but critical assistance academics and researchers can offer in improving the city's response to those with housing instability.

These initiatives establish a research advisory board and build on the Bloomberg Administration's successful efforts to coordinate the sharing of data between public agencies. They establish meaningful opportunities for interested researchers to help evaluate existing programs and inform the development of new strategies.

Perhaps most importantly, these initiatives establish the benchmarks and outcomes associated with key initiatives throughout *Uniting for Solutions Beyond Shelter*. By building into initiatives specific targets and evaluation components, partners involved in their implementation will hold themselves accountable for producing the results envisioned in this plan.

# TAKING ACTION

The Next Step	Current Status	Taking Action
<p>Create and Maintain a Research Advisory Board</p>	<p>During the past few years, the city has greatly expanded efforts to use research and data to inform, evaluate, and improve programs for homeless people. A tremendous amount of additional interest on the part of academics and researchers exists. But it is not part of a coordinated effort to improve results.</p>	<p>A board will assist public agencies and providers as they launch new research initiatives. By setting priorities and reviewing methods, the board will encourage productive research that advances the initiatives in <i>Uniting for Solutions Beyond Shelter</i>. It will also communicate key information to the research, provider, and government communities.</p>
<p>Conduct One-City Data Matches</p>	<p>DHS has recently conducted an unprecedented number of data matches with databases from other public agencies. This information is casting light on why many people become homeless, as well as the great degree to which different agencies serve the same clients.</p>	<p>These efforts will be formalized and the data will be used to improve inter-agency partnerships to prevent homelessness. For example, data matches between the New York City Housing Authority and DHS show when Section 8 households fail to renew their subsidies. This information will be used to target resources to at-risk households before they become homeless.</p>
<p>Track Key Indicators Impacting Homeless New Yorkers</p>	<p>Research indicates that drug, alcohol, mental health, and health problems are prevalent among segments of the homeless population – particularly those on the streets. While a wealth of documentation about these issues exists, there is no centralized database and tracking system.</p>	<p>A new homeless health tracking initiative, drawing on data from DHS and the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, will be used to track and present information about the health status of homeless New Yorkers. With a commitment to continuous quality improvement, the system will help identify service gaps, aid program planning, and assist in targeting medical and other resources more effectively.</p>
<p>Use Data and Research to Inform and Evaluate Homeless Prevention Efforts</p>	<p>A significant amount of data and research exists on why individuals and families become homeless. This same data show the difficulties of effectively targeting homeless prevention efforts. Major projects have been undertaken to inform the city's homeless prevention approach.</p>	<p>HOMESTAT will give public agencies and providers new data on reasons for homelessness, best practices, and insight into broader policies that can reduce homelessness. In addition, work conducted by various city agencies is identifying the most common routes to homelessness and will guide and serve as a baseline for comparing the results of new prevention programs.</p>

The Next Step	Current Status	Taking Action
Track Community Level Performance	Without concrete targets and milestones, a heightened level of accountability for the many initiatives included in this plan will not exist, with the chance they will not get accomplished.	With the release of <i>Uniting for Solutions Beyond Shelter</i> , public agencies will identify and track progress in achieving milestones, targets, and results. A key tracking manager will bring together participants to discuss progress and maintain accountability.
Reinforce the Objectives of <i>Uniting for Solutions Beyond Shelter</i> Through Staff Training and Development	DHS has provided shelter staff with training on client responsibility and hosted quality improvement seminars on a range of initiatives. Some culture shifts have occurred, but more are needed.	In coordination with the release of <i>Uniting for Solutions Beyond Shelter</i> , staff training will be conducted utilizing resources that focus staff on the plan's priority areas. These will increase staff fluency in subjects like homeless prevention and the principles of client self-advocacy and responsibility.
Implement a Broad Public Education Campaign	Despite widespread concern for the well being of homeless people, there are few opportunities for meaningful engagement for communities and individual volunteers. This contributes to the sense that homelessness cannot be solved.	Marketing and public relations professionals will be tapped to create a long-term public education campaign. This will build public support for solutions, create community ownership around addressing homelessness, and build confidence around ongoing and substantial public resource investments.