

Understanding Renewal Trajectories in New York City-Funded Rental Assistance Programs

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Background

Context

- Housing costs are a major challenge for low-income individuals and families, especially in urban areas like New York City (NYC) that have shortages of affordable housing (NYU Furman Center, 2020; NYC Department of Housing Preservation and Development, 2022).
- Government subsidies (typically in the form of individual vouchers or direct payments to housing providers) are one significant policy to provide stable, affordable housing to low-income populations.
 - Have been found to prevent homelessness and improve food security, and (along with intensive case management) decrease drug and alcohol abuse (Wood et al., 2008; Smith et al., 2005; Evans et al., 2019; Cheung et al., 2007).
- The Section 8 Housing Choice voucher program is the primary Federal subsidized housing program, but vouchers can have long waiting lists (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, n.d.).
- To address unmet need, NYC has made substantial investments in its own rental assistance programs. Most are administered through the NYC Human Resource Administration's Homelessness Prevention Administration (HPA) (NYC Human Resources Administration, n.d.).

NYC Rental Assistance Programs

- Programs focus primarily on single adults and families with children in NYC Department of Homeless Services (DHS) shelters.
- Applicants must meet income eligibility criteria (recently increased from <250 percent of the federal poverty level to <80 percent of area median income (AMI)).
- After the State and City funded Advantage program was eliminated in 2011, a series of City-funded rental assistance programs were launched in 2014. These were consolidated in 2018-19 into the City Family Homelessness and Eviction Prevention Rent Supplement (CityFHEPS) program.
- For most clients, there's an official 5-year limit on participation, with annual renewals during this period. That said, households who continue to meet the program's income eligibility criteria can continue beyond 5 years with a "good cause" reason, such as having a disabled or household member age 60+, having insufficient income to cover rent without the assistance, and not having other housing options.

Evaluation Questions

- What are the renewal trajectories among single adults and families with children who receive City-funded rental assistance over an approximately five-year follow-up period?
- Do renewal patterns differ between families with children and single adult households?
- What factors are associated with different renewal patterns?
- In the approximately five years after obtaining rental assistance, how many households enter DHS shelter? How does entry vary by household type and renewal trajectories?



Key Findings

Renewal Patterns

- A sizable minority of households failed to renew their rental assistance before reaching five years, although most likely remained eligible. Single adult case types were less likely to renew than families.
- Among single adults, trends appeared associated with differences in housing type. Single adults could receive assistance for rooms (vs. own apartment), and those in rooms were less stable and renewed less often. Those in smaller buildings without rent-regulated units were also less likely to renew.
- Moves were highly associated with non-renewal of rental assistance, both in administrative data and a survey of non-renewers. Findings suggest moves may occur *before* non-renewal and lead to a loss of subsidy, suggesting that more outreach regarding supports for moving *with subsidies* could be useful.
 - On a survey of non-continuous renewers, eviction was the most common reason given for moving, followed by apartment maintenance or safety issues.
- Other reasons for non-renewal on the survey included believing one was ineligible and lack of clarity about the process.
- Among both single adults and families, failure to renew was more common in certain (often low-income) community districts.

Key Findings (cont.)

Homeless Shelter Outcomes

- NYC rental assistance kept most recipients out of shelter during the approximately 5-year follow-up period, and those who renewed rental assistance stayed out at the highest rate.
 - Specifically, while the vast majority of recipients had spent substantial time in homeless shelter prior to rental assistance receipt, just 19% of families and 26% of individuals reentered shelter during the study period.
 - For both families and single adults, those with the longest prior shelter stay were the most likely to renew continuously after receiving rental assistance.
- The small number of those entering shelter following rental assistance receipt were much more likely than other rental assistance recipients to have a documented move from their initial subsidized residence before applying for shelter.
- Among the minority of families who did reenter shelter after exiting with City-funded rental assistance, most cited eviction or domestic violence as their reason for homelessness.

Methods

Sample and Data Sources

Cases that began receiving NYC-funded rental assistance between January 2015-June 2016 (N=5,220)

Data	Source
Rental assistance entry and renewal dates through Oct. 2020 (4.5-5.75 years of follow-up)	HPA administrative data
DHS shelter stays from initial rental assistance receipt date through Oct. 2020. Last address before any shelter stays.	DHS shelter data
Address of rental assistance receipt through Oct. 2020	HPA administrative data
Building and neighborhood level data for addresses (e.g., building size, community district)	NYC Departments of City Planning, Housing Preservation and Development, and Housing and Community Renewal data

Online surveys of reasons for rental assistance non-renewal (N=75)

Email addresses obtained from HRA case data

Selected and contacted random sample of 500 non-rental-assistance renewers with emails

Response rate of **16.6%***

Though fairly equal numbers of each case type were emailed, more responses from family cases (n=62) than single cases (n=21)

Compared to all non-renewers, respondents had similar socio-demographics. The majority were Black or Hispanic.

*A total of 83 people completed the survey, but 8 were not included in the final analysis as they did not recall receiving rental assistance and therefore could not answer most questions. Additionally, 1 person skipped questions about reasons for non-renewal.

Analyses

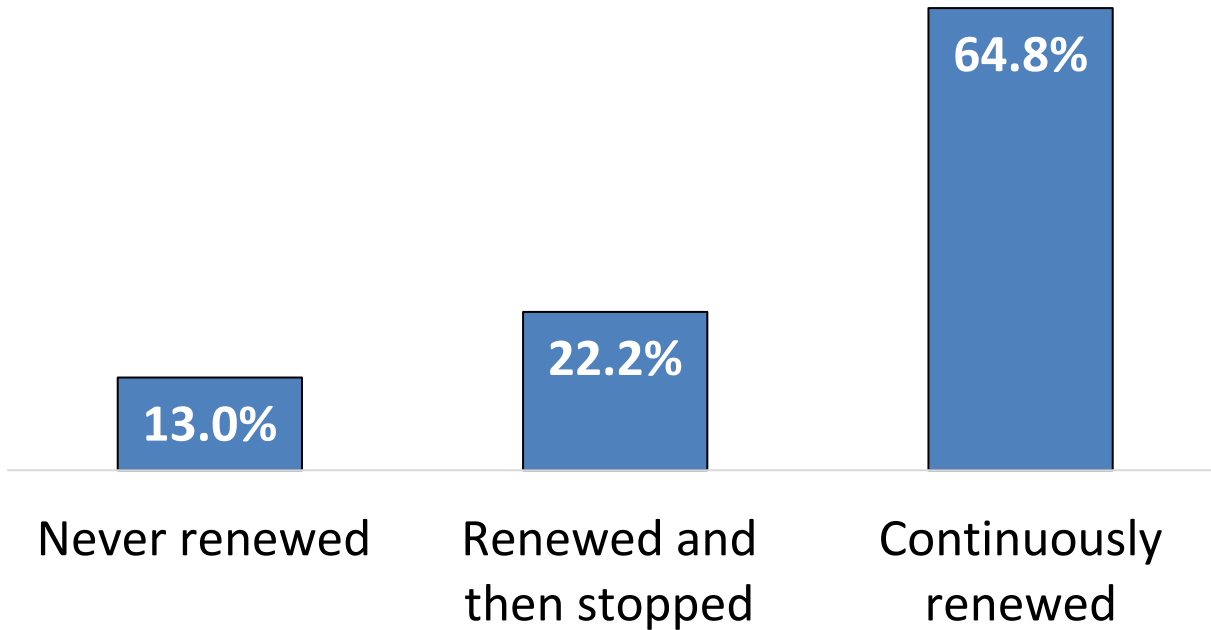
- Client-level data matched by identifiers (case number and/or SSN).
- Building-level data matched to our cohorts' address data by Building Identification Number (BIN) or Borough, Block and Lot (BBL) number.
- Descriptive statistics (frequency, percentages, ANOVAs, t-tests, Chi-Squares) compared renewal trajectories by socio-demographic and housing-level factors.
- Descriptive statistics were used to analyze survey responses.

Findings

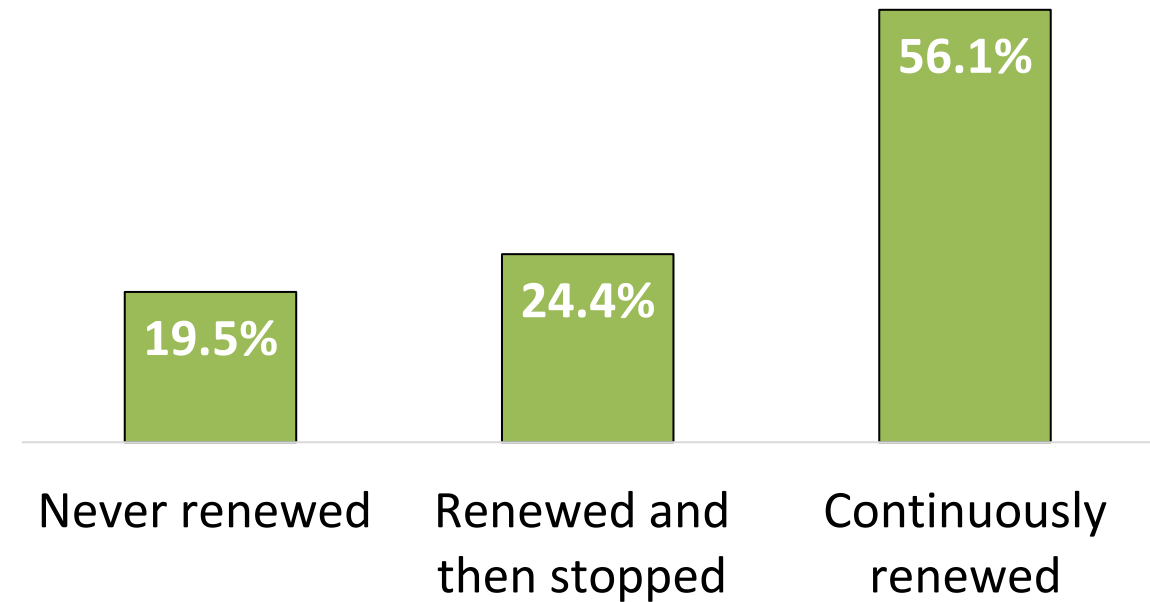
Rental Assistance Renewals

- The majority renewed at least once over approximately five years of follow-up, and more than half renewed continuously.
- Families with children cases were more likely to renew continuously than single adult cases.

Families with Children (n=1,975)



Single Adults (n=3,254)

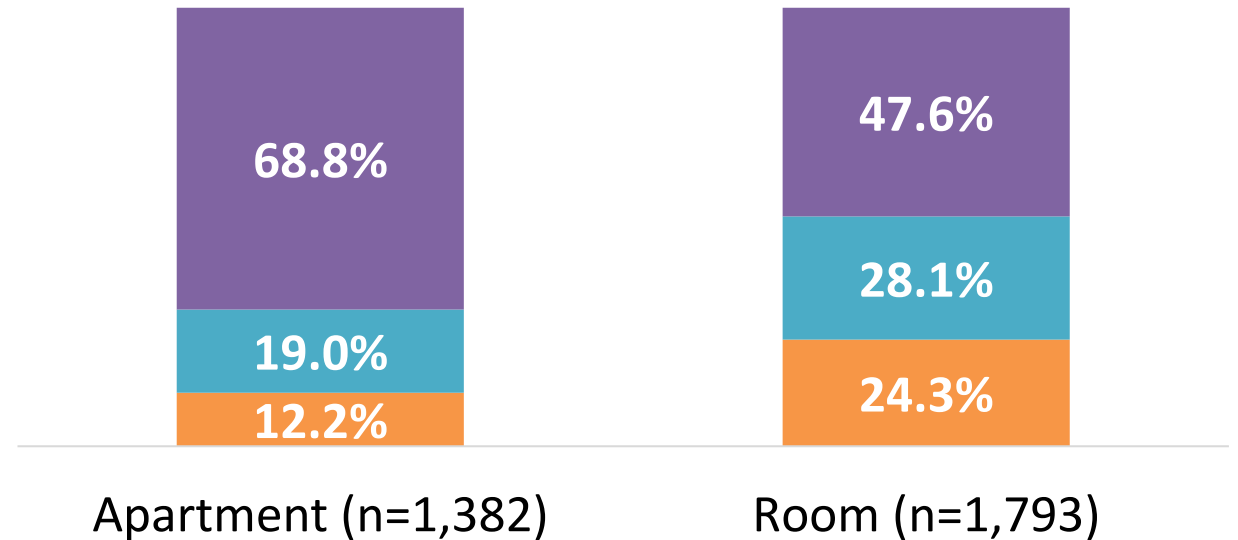


Housing-Related Factors Associated with Renewal

- While almost all families received rental assistance for their own apartment, 56% of single adults received assistance to rent a room.
- Those in rooms were much less likely to renew, potentially because of the greater instability of this housing type.
 - In the small (<30%) subgroup of single adults with address data available after their last renewal, those in a room were both more likely to move and less likely to renew rental assistance (*not shown*).
- Family cases who moved were also less likely to renew rental assistance (*not shown*).

Single Adult Housing Type

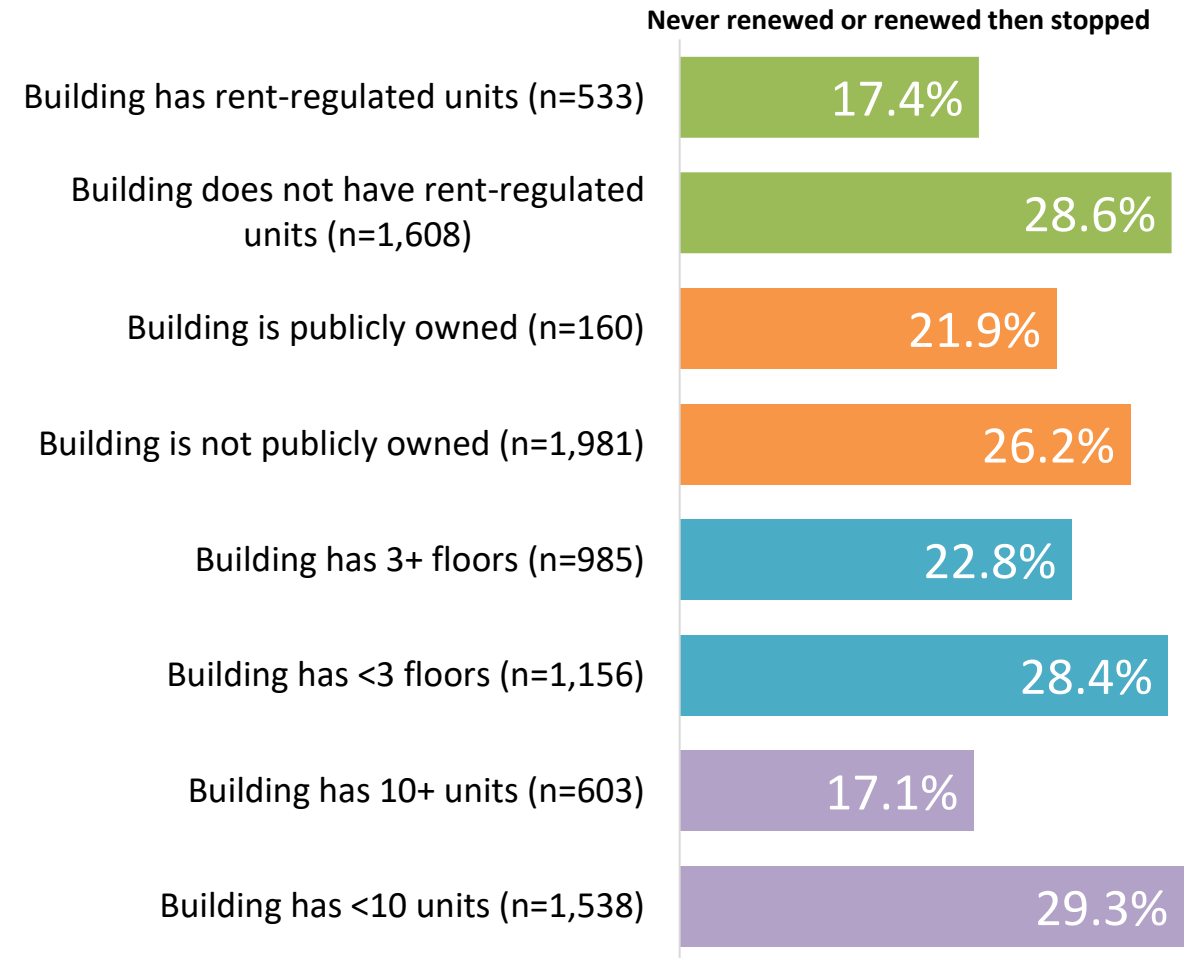
■ Never renewed ■ Renewed then stopped ■ Continuous renewals



Housing-Related Factors Associated with Renewal (cont.)

- For single adults, those receiving rental assistance in smaller buildings and in buildings without rent regulated units were most likely not to renew or renew then stop.
- For families with children, no substantial differences were found by building characteristics (*not shown*).
- We identified several community districts (CDs) for both families with children and single adults which had lower rates of continuous renewals (*not shown*).
- Most of these CDs had median incomes below the NYC average.

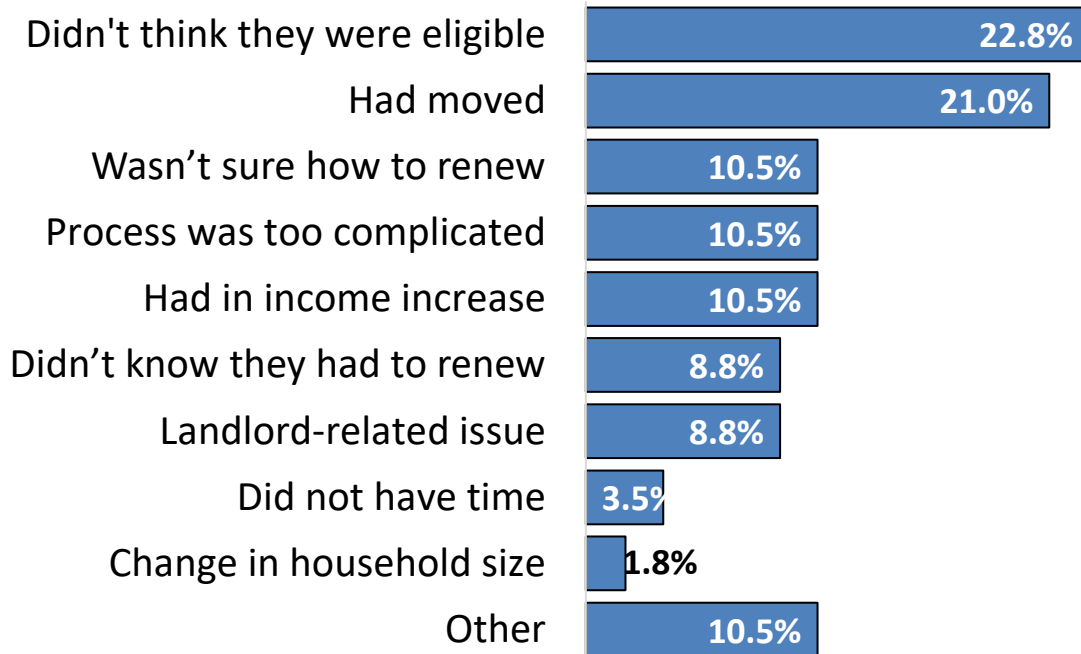
Single Adult Building Characteristics (n=2,141)



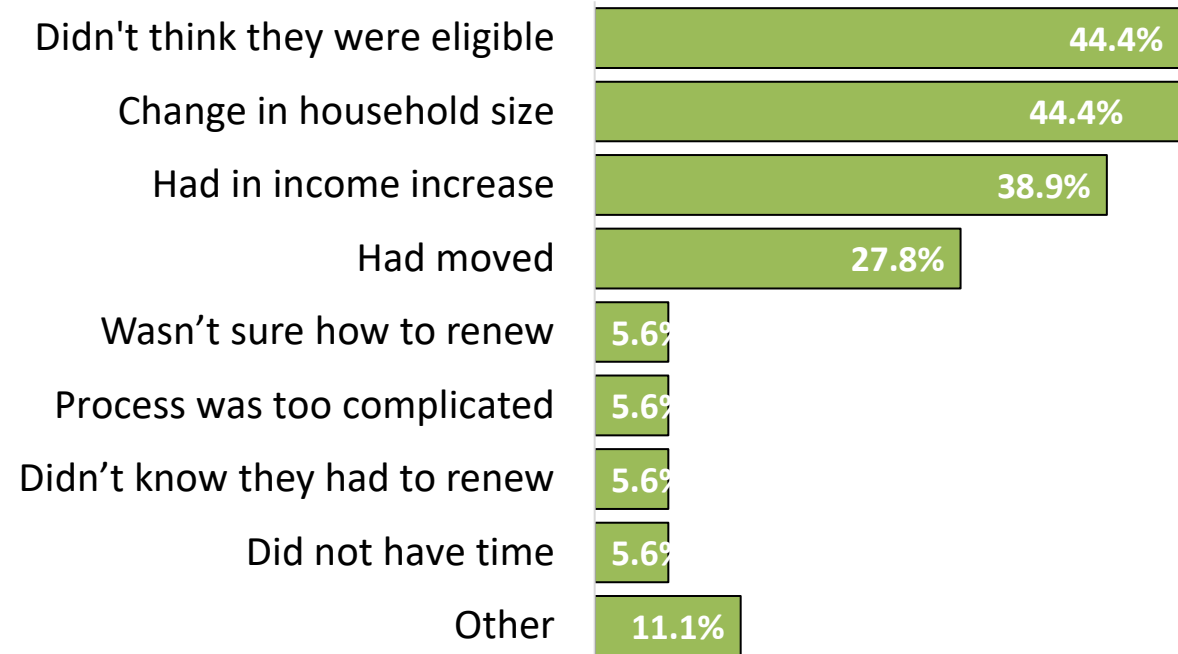
Surveys: Reasons for Non-Renewal

- In both household types, believing one was ineligible, moves, and lack of clarity about the process were common reasons for non-renewal.
- For single adults, changes that might have impacted eligibility (household size or income) were also common reasons.

Families with Children (n=57)



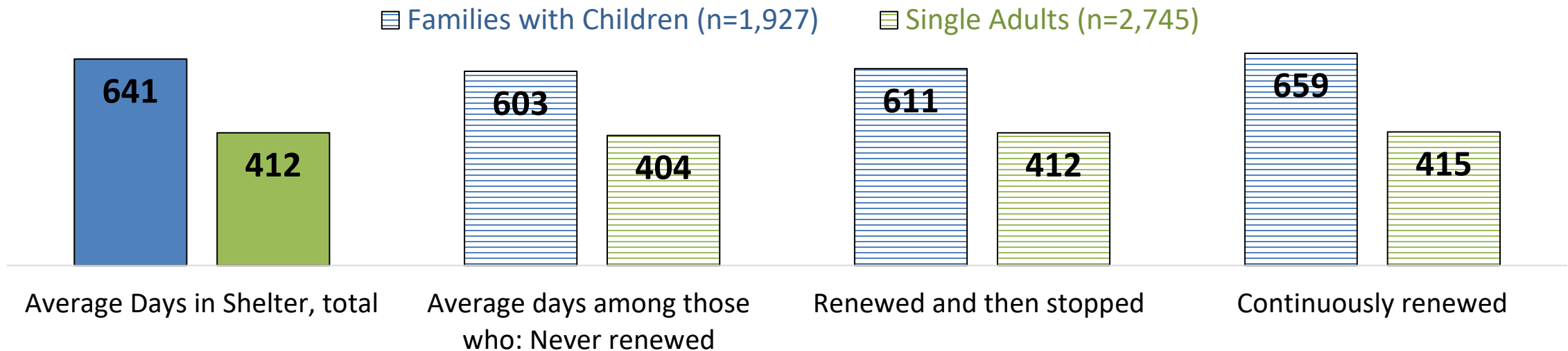
Single Adults (n=18)



Shelter History

- As City-funded rental assistance was provided primarily to support transitions to permanent housing from DHS shelter, nearly all **(98%)** families with children households and **84%** of single adults had spent time in DHS shelter during the four years prior to initial rental assistance receipt.
 - Some families and singles receive rental assistance after living in the community or non-DHS shelters.
- Consistent with broader trends in DHS shelters, families had longer stays than single adults. For both families and single adults, those with the longest prior shelter stay were the most likely to renew continuously.

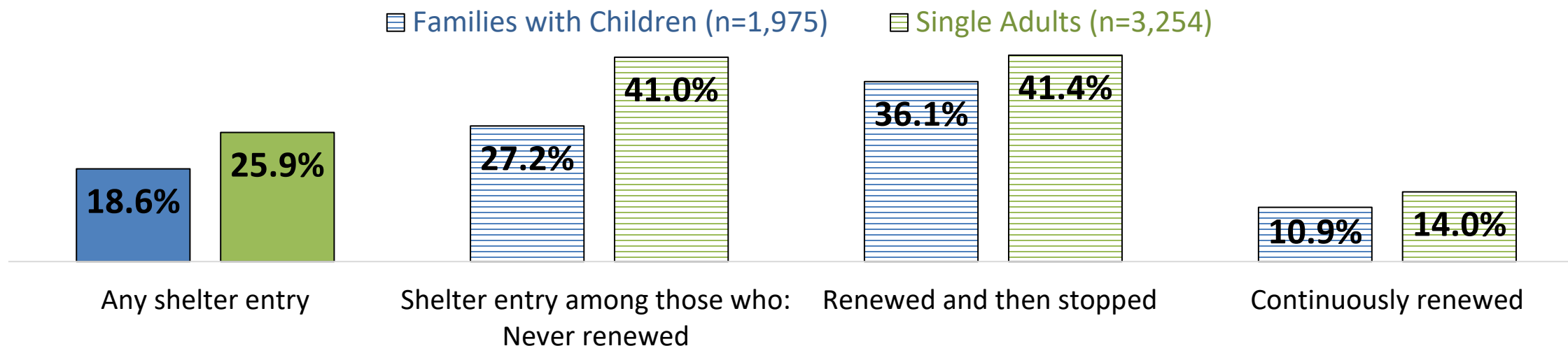
Time in DHS Shelter in the 4 Years *Prior* to Rental Assistance Receipt



Shelter Entry After Rental Assistance Receipt

- Over the 4.5 + years since rental assistant receipt, more than 80% of families with children and about 75% of single adults stayed out of DHS shelter for at least 4.5+ years. As might be expected given the goals of rental assistance, shelter entry rates were highest among those who never renewed and lowest among those who continuously renewed.
- For Single adults, shelter reentry rates were twice as high among those placed in rooms versus apartments: **32.8% vs. 16.9%**.
- Among families (re)entering shelter, **44.8%** cited eviction as their primary reason. **25.2%** cited domestic-violence-related reasons and **14.3%** cited household overcrowding or discord.

Rates of DHS Shelter Entry in 4.5+ Years *After* to Rental Assistance Receipt



Moves and Shelter Stays

- Of the cases who entered shelter after rental assistance receipt, **42.7%** of families with children and **52.0%** single adults reported a most recent address that differed from their initial rental assistance placement.
- For the subsample for which we were able to identify addresses post-rental assistance receipt, those who moved were more likely to enter shelter.
- On the survey of non-continuous renewers, eviction was the most common reason given for moving (34%), followed by apartment maintenance or safety issues (27%). Other reasons (endorsed by 10-15% each) included the rent increasing too much, rental assistance ending, moves into subsidized housing like Section 8, or landlord issues (like them no longer accepting vouchers).



Conclusion

Implications and Next Steps

- Future efforts to increase renewals of NYC rental assistance could focus on:
 - Communication about eligibility and process.
 - Considerations of building quality or neighborhood of placements.
 - Preventing moves—or supporting moves while retaining assistance (particularly for single adults in rooms). **Note that recent policy changes bringing the city rental assistance level up to federal Section 8 levels (with annual increases) will likely help stabilize clients going forward.**
- Results may have implications for renewal-based rental assistance programs in other jurisdictions.
- Further research could be conducted on:
 - Collecting more data on unmeasured neighborhood/building factors (e.g., accessibility, repairs needed in the unit, landlord behavior) that might lead to non-renewals and better understanding on the dynamics between these factors, rental assistance and housing stability.
 - Whether recent changes in NYC rental assistance programs, including increases in maximum rental subsidy amounts (Pozarycki, 2021), also change renewal or shelter entry patterns, or factors associated with them.

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For More Information

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