

DHS Integrated Case Management for Street Homeless Clients

Project Overview

Integrated Case Management for Street Homeless Clients will enhance the ability of the Department of Homeless Services (DHS) to seamlessly track and manage cases and databases for New Yorkers experiencing unsheltered homelessness through the City's HOME-STAT initiative, the most comprehensive outreach program in the country, by expanding the StreetSmart case management system across facilities dedicated to serving unsheltered homeless individuals, including Drop-In Centers and Safe Havens. This expansion of StreetSmart for case management purposes will give the agency and its not-for-profit social service and outreach provider partners more integrated and seamless access to data that can be used to improve tracking, engagement and coordination of services for clients throughout the rehousing process.

Quick Stats

Agency	Start Date	FY20 Number Served	FY21 Budget	FY21 Number Served
DHS	April 2019	14,904	\$770,000	14,904

Context

In January 2020, DHS estimated that 3,857 individuals experience street homelessness in New York City.¹ The City has faced challenges coordinating across the multiple City agencies and providers that are involved in serving its unsheltered homeless population – a population that may be resistant to services and in need of complex and ongoing medical, mental health, and substance use assistance. HOME-STAT, launched in December 2015, aimed to better engage and transition New Yorkers experiencing unsheltered homelessness off the streets and subways to tailored services and permanent housing. As part of HOME-STAT, the StreetSmart case management system was built to better coordinate between the five City-contracted Street Outreach providers and DHS. The StreetSmart app allows Street Outreach workers to log data about the circumstances and unique needs of individuals they encounter and engage, including those individuals who they confirm are experiencing unsheltered homelessness, promoting more effective communication between Outreach workers, outreach providers as organizations, and DHS staff, as well as more consistent and informed engagement with individuals experiencing homelessness.

In addition to Outreach, DHS provides specialized, low-barrier shelter to New Yorkers experiencing unsheltered homelessness, known as Drop-In Centers and Safe Havens. Drop-In Centers provide services that are focused on meeting the immediate needs of individuals experiencing unsheltered homelessness, such as showers, hot meals, laundry facilities, clothing, medical care, recreational space, employment referrals, and other social services. While Drop-In Centers do not provide overnight shelter beds, they can and do welcome and connect clients to services 24/7, with staff on site helping clients identify the right mix of supports and transitional shelter facilities that meet their unique and specific needs. Safe Havens also target and serve individuals experiencing unsheltered homelessness, with a focus on those who've lived unsheltered for significant periods of time (often termed 'chronic'), by offering overnight beds and on-site staff who work closely with clients to deepen relationships, help stabilize their lives, and ultimately assist them in transitioning into more permanent housing. Although there is considerable overlap in clients between these areas and clients in the Outreach program, the data systems of these service areas are not currently aligned with one another, making it cumbersome to streamline services for clients.

StreetSmart laid the groundwork for data sharing between DHS, Human Resources Administration, Mayor's Office of Operations, and outreach providers. Future projects will incorporate additional partners such as Department of Sanitation, Department of Correction, NYC Health + Hospitals, and more, as needed. Creating a system that alerts users when a client interacts with another agency will enable better discharge planning and could have a major impact on continuity of care.

Research & Evidence

In 1998, Kuhn and Culhane examined shelter utilization data to develop user classifications, demonstrating three distinct types of clients in shelters: chronic, episodic, and transitional.ⁱⁱ Their research informed policymakers to focus resources on chronic homelessness: homelessness experienced for at least a year – or repeatedly – while struggling with a disabling condition.ⁱⁱⁱ

Two factors have limited expanding classification and analysis. First, the lack of available data has limited researchers. DHS data includes over 10,000 unsheltered homeless clients going back 5 years, and therefore offers a new opportunity to expand typology analysis. Critical variables include known locations over time, placement times and types, and demographic information. Starting in 2017, DHS has access to expanded service utilization data that is being collected in StreetSmart.

Second, previous typology methods have examined only a few variables at a time. New methodologies such as machine learning overcome variable limitations. In addition, these new methodologies and the newly collected data will enable DHS to move beyond descriptive analysis to better predict outcomes and prescribe effective courses of action.

Project Description

DHS will engage service providers to co-create the design for the expansion of StreetSmart to the Drop-In Center and Safe Haven service areas. DHS will hire a dedicated product manager to employ user-centered design principles and engage with Drop-In and Safe Haven providers to gather initial feature requirements and observe user experience with the software.

As part of this project, DHS will also hire a data scientist to further the research into predictive analytics and ultimately develop algorithms and insights. Introducing Drop-In and Safe Haven service areas into StreetSmart will further enable DHS to develop robust predictive analytics, which will be used to improve service delivery and create new interventions.

Expanding StreetSmart to cover the Safe Haven and Drop-In Centers is a prerequisite step to enabling research that meets the following objectives:

- Identify vulnerable cohorts and risk factors for becoming vulnerable
- Identify high utilizers of services and risk factors for becoming high utilizers
- Evaluate likely effectiveness of specific interventions or combinations of interventions
- Evaluate performance of outreach providers by comparing the outcomes of equivalent clusters of clients
- Predict future need for services
- Quantify impact of external factors

Target Population

The target population of this project is the approximately 14,904 street homeless clients receiving case management from the diverse Outreach, Safe Haven, and Drop-In Center non-profit providers contracted by DHS.

Expected Outcomes

- Improve data quality for Safe Haven and Drop-In shelter through data cleaning efforts of applications developers
- Create Street Homeless Solutions key performance indicators dashboard
- Develop recommendations on how to record and evaluate barriers to placement for individuals experiencing unsheltered homelessness, especially those experiencing chronic unsheltered homelessness
- Utilize predictive analytics to develop recommendations for improving service delivery and optimizing the allocation of resources

ⁱ NYC department of Homeless Services, 2020 Homeless Outreach Population Estimate (HOPE) Survey Results. Retrieved from: <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/dhs/downloads/pdf/hope-2020-results.pdf>

ⁱⁱ Kuhn, R., & Culhane, D. P. (1998). Applying Cluster Analysis to Test a Typology of Homelessness by Pattern of Shelter Utilization: Results from the Analysis of Administrative Data. Retrieved from: http://repository.upenn.edu/spp_papers/96

ⁱⁱⁱ "Chronically Homeless." National Alliance to End Homelessness, Jan. 2019, Retrieved from: endhomelessness.org/homelessness-in-america/who-experiences-homelessness/chronically-homeless/