



Photo credit: DSS

Stopping Shelter Census Growth

Agencies: **Department of Social Services (DSS)/Department of Homeless Services (DHS)**

Context

Homelessness in New York City is the result of decades of changes in our economy – particularly exponential increases in income inequality; as well as the growing lack of affordable housing, particularly in large urban areas; federal disinvestment in subsidized housing resources and de-institutionalization of mental health and correctional facilities. As a result, the DHS shelter census increased 115% in the 20 years before the Administration began. In just the three years from 2011 to 2014, following the end of the Advantage rental assistance program due to State disinvestment and the City's decision not to finance the program alone, there was a nearly 40% shelter census increase, to more than 51,000. Concurrently, affordable housing options in New York City continued to decline - from 1994 to 2012, the City suffered a net loss of about 150,000

rent-stabilized housing units, or 16% of the total rent-regulated stock. The most recent NYC Housing Vacancy survey showed that wage growth from 2009-2017 was stagnant and that more than 90% of renter households in poverty had lease rents at least 30% of their income, and 83% had lease rents at least 50% of their income.^{1,2}

Response

The 2017 Turning the Tide plan is the first comprehensive approach presented by an administration to address homelessness and the haphazard homeless services system that built up over 40 years, and bring program accountability and oversight to address the needs of New Yorkers experiencing homelessness. In particular, the Administration:

- enhanced prevention measures through a first-in-the-nation Right to Counsel program that provides free legal assistance to households facing eviction;
- expanded the Homebase community homelessness prevention program, which provides counseling, connections to legal and financial resources, and relocation assistance, by increasing from 14 to 26 sites and adding aftercare services to prevent shelter re-entry; and
- made rent arrears grants more accessible to clients; and created and expanded subsidized housing options, including development of the CityFHEPS program, that provided City-funded rental assistance vouchers to move households from shelter and prevent homelessness in the community; created pilot permanent housing models, such as the master lease program; and began the development of 15,000 new supportive housing units over the course of 15 years. These steps were all in support of moving individuals out of shelters or keeping them in their homes by addressing gaps between rent and income.³

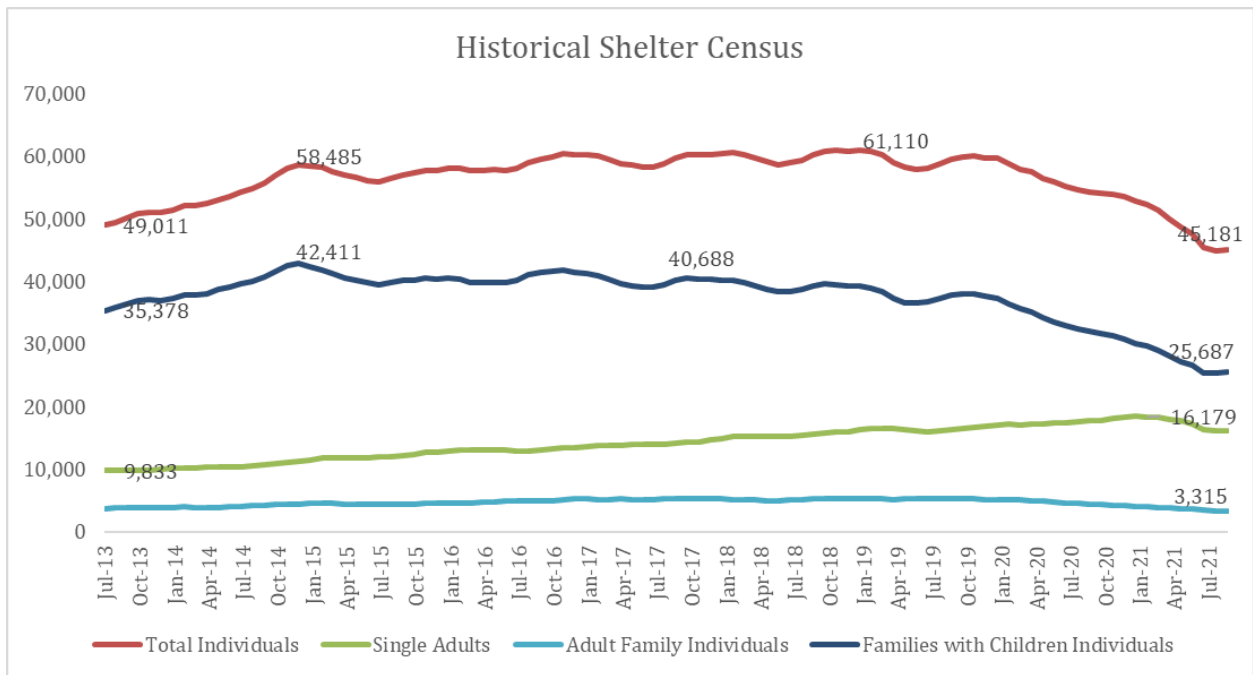
Results

After nearly four decades of an increasing DHS shelter population in New York City, the de Blasio Administration has finally broken the trajectory of growth in the DHS shelter census. The new programs, reforms, and investments we are implementing are moving the City in the right direction, holding the DHS census essentially flat year-over-year in 2017, 2018 and 2019, and then reducing it to approximately 46,000 now. In particular, we have driven down the number of families with children experiencing homelessness and residing in shelter on any given night, with the peak number of individuals across those families declining by more than 17,000 between 2014 (when families in shelter on a given night were comprised of 43,208 individuals), and today (when families in shelter on a given night are comprised of approximately 26,000 individuals).

¹ Analysis of 2017 NYC Housing Vacancy Survey (HVS) conducted by the DSS Office of Evaluation and Research.

² Years referenced in the text vary based on most recent available data. Housing Affordability published data, including HVS and rent stabilization data, are lagged.

³ More details on rental assistance and subsidized housing can be found in a separate brief.



Without the Administration's initiatives, projections indicated there would be 71,000 people in shelter today instead of the current number of approximately 46,000.

Beneficiary Stories

A few years back, I became homeless due to a decrease in income. I was no longer able to afford the rent in NYC as it was too high to manage and maintain. I took shelter in the NYC Department of Homeless shelters. I was able to qualify for a CityFHEPS voucher, which helped looking for an apartment. While in the shelter, I participated in a program for the homeless and filled out an application called "Homeless Housing Application" or as we know it as "HHA". This program was phenomenal. I applied and within a few months, I was selected for a lottery apartment in Bushwick. I honestly never thought I would be able to afford the neighborhood enough to live in it. Filling out an application gave me an equal opportunity to have the same quality of life that others have had. Although it was no walk in the park, being homeless and a part of the shelter system, it was worth the work and the wait. I am now living happily in MY OWN studio apartment. I was able to reunite with my two daughters and have a peaceful relationship with them. - Robert McBride

Next Steps

Continued efforts to drive down the census include the first-in-the nation right to counsel program and providing rent arrears benefits that are an entitlement, both of which prevent evictions, and the ongoing need for permanent housing programs to promote shelter moveouts.

Additional Metrics

- Daily Census Report found [here](#)

- DHS Data Dashboard found [here](#)

Relevant Publications

- **Turning the Tide on Homelessness in New York City**