

Housing as a Human Right

Addressing Family Homelessness in New York City

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Rising Homelessness in NYC

In 2019, families with children accounted for 70% of the New York City municipal shelter population. Despite massive political campaigns by the Bloomberg and De Blasio Administrations to end homelessness, the issue of family homelessness has grown significantly worse since the inauguration of the Bloomberg Administration in 2002. Throughout its tenure, the Bloomberg Administration saw an 80% increase in the number of families in the city's municipal shelters. The De Blasio Administration has also failed to make significant improvements to the problem, with a 55% increase in family homelessness occurring from 2011 to 2018. In December 2019, the mayor announced his third major policy aimed at ending street homelessness in New York within five years, however, like the Bloomberg Administration, the De Blasio Administration neglects to address structural inequality at the root of the family homelessness issue in New York, as well as the root causes of family homelessness themselves.

Figure 1 demonstrates the rise of family and child homelessness in New York City from 2002 to 2018, with the most dramatic growth rates occurring in children under the age of 5.

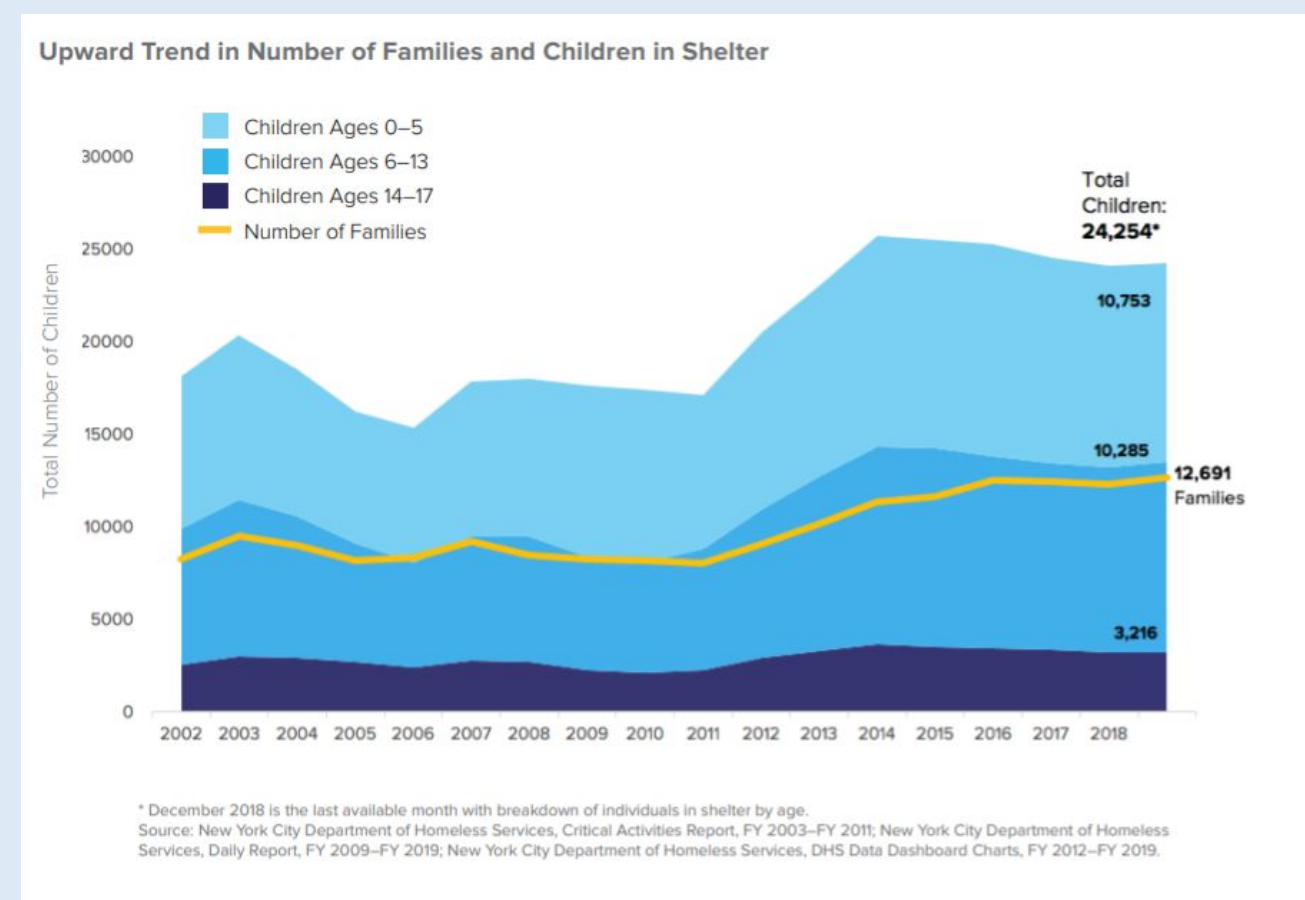


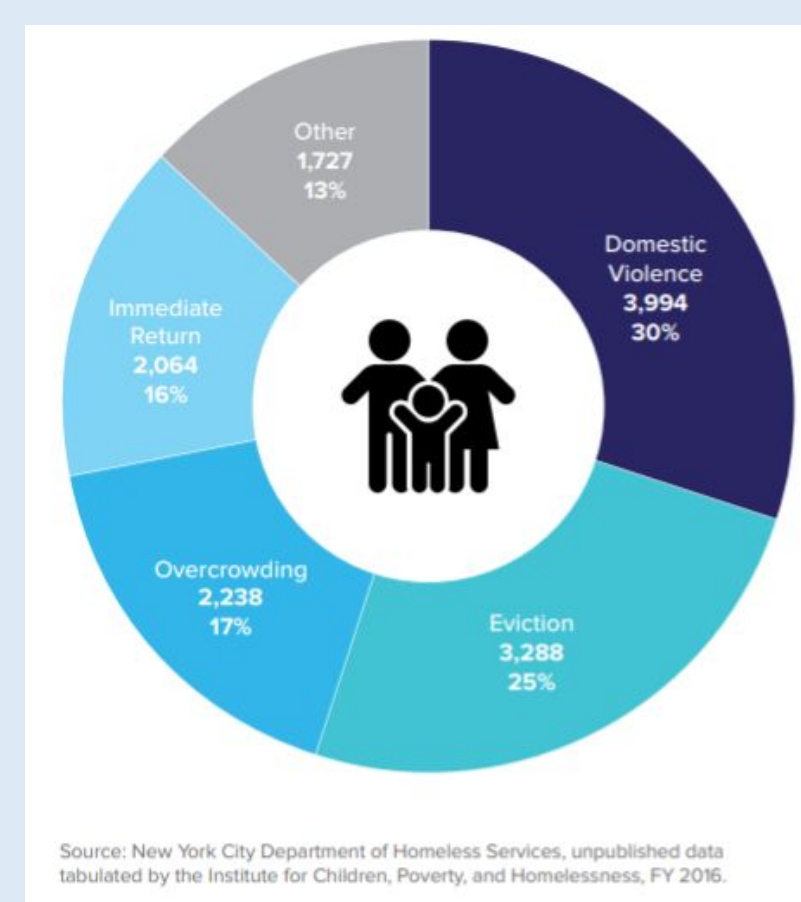
Figure 1. [Graph illustrates growth of homeless families children in NYC shelters]. *Institute for Children, Poverty and Homelessness*. Retrieved from <https://www.icphusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Shelter-DynamicsFinal07819.pdf>

Causes of Family Homelessness

- Lack of affordable housing
 - Coalition for the Homeless reports that 73% of low-income families in New York City spend over half of their annual income on rent payments.
 - Additionally, 45% of middle-income families spend over half of their annual income on rent.
- Eviction
 - Coalition for Homelessness reported eviction as the cause of homelessness for 25% of families with children in 2016, making it the second most prominent cause of family homelessness that year.
- Unemployment
 - Unemployed families are three times more likely to become homeless than employed families.
 - 60% of New York families would be unable to afford living expenses within 3 months of becoming unemployed.
- Domestic violence
 - 80% of women and children in homeless families experience domestic violence in their lifetimes.
 - In 2016, Coalition for the Homeless reported domestic violence as the number one cause for families with children entering homelessness.

Figure 2 depicts reasons for families entering the New York City shelter system in 2016. This illustration excludes families deemed ineligible for shelter entry. The Institute for Children, Poverty and Homelessness notes that over 50% of New York City shelter applicants are denied entry.

Figure 2. [Depicts reasons family were eligible for NYC shelters in 2016]. *Institute for Children, Poverty and Homelessness*. Retrieved from <https://www.icphusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Shelter-DynamicsFinal07819.pdf>



Source: New York City Department of Homeless Services, unpublished data tabulated by the Institute for Children, Poverty, and Homelessness, FY 2016.

Bloomberg's Housing Policy

In 2004, Mayor Mike Bloomberg announced his five year plan to reduce homelessness shelter populations from 36,399 by 66%. In 2009, the municipal shelter population was 36,322. When Bloomberg left office in 2012, that figure was 52,000.

Housing Stability Plus: October 2004, Bloomberg eliminated prioritization of shelter residents in the allocation of Section 8 housing vouchers, and replaced the policy with a rental assistance program, Housing Stability Plus (HSP) the basis of perversity. To become eligible for HSP, families had to have spent the last 90 days in a shelter and receive welfare. The subsidies were meager in nature, with a family of three receiving only \$925 monthly, and the monthly payment decreasing 20% per subsequent year enrolled in HSP.

Advantage: In 2007, Bloomberg Administration enacted Advantage New York. While similar in nature to HSP, Advantage was designed as a one-year program, with only extreme cases receiving two-year subsidies. Advantage had stricter eligibility requirements, including a 20 hour per week work requirement and 15 hour per week work-related activity requirement in the first year, and a 35 hour weekly work requirement during the second year of the program. Additionally, beneficiaries paid \$50 monthly rent, and had to have spent the 60 days in a shelter. Advantage was defunded in 2011, and proved inefficient through high rates of recidivism, with approximately 27% of Advantage beneficiaries returning to the city's municipal shelter system.

Figure 3. demonstrates the ineffectiveness of Advantage in keeping New Yorkers from reentering the municipal shelter system in comparison to other types of aid., including Section 8 housing vouchers, completely subsidized housing, and NYCHA public housing. The low recidivism rates rates for housing vouchers and full subsidies is consistent with the data citing lack of affordable housing as a significant cause of family homelessness.

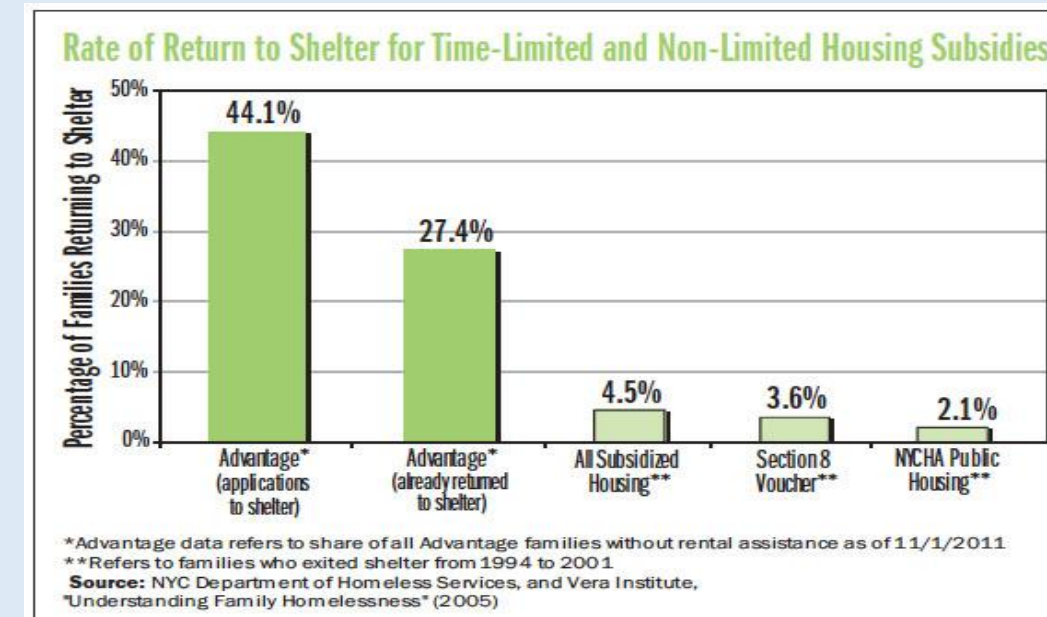


Figure 3. [Graph illustrates rate of return to shelter system based on type of aid received]. *Coalition for the Homeless*. Retrieved from <https://www.coalitionforthehomeless.org/mayor-bloombergs-revolving-door-of-homelessness/>

De Blasio's Housing Policy

With the inauguration of the progressive De Blasio Administration in 2014 came a renewed sense of hope among grassroots homelessness advocate groups in New York. However, 6 years later, the crisis of family homelessness in New York City is much unchanged. While De Blasio reversed Bloomberg's end to priority housing subsidies and Section 8 vouchers for shelter families, he has failed to address the major causes of family homelessness, and housing advocates have been disappointed by the number of families being relocated to Section 8 or NYCHA housing. In fact, the administration has seen significant increases in the municipal shelter population

Living in Communities: De Blasio's LINC program, similar to Bloomberg's Advantage, provides publicly funded housing subsidies to eligible persons in the municipal shelter system. LINC is divided into six categories, LINC I for working shelter families, LINC II for families experiencing chronic homelessness, LINC III for domestic violence survivors, LINC IV for adult families, the elderly, and the mentally ill, LINC V for working adults, and LINC VI which relies on kinship systems to relocate those in shelters to stay with their relatives. Unlike Advantage, which offered two year subsidies, LINC subsidies last five years following shelter exit. However, LINC subsidies bear significant barriers to entry, including mandatory social service participation, and minimum 90 day shelter stays for working families, which bars many otherwise eligible New York families from participation. Fortunately, De Blasio did reinstate NYCHA and Section 8 voucher prioritization to shelter families, however families must be SSI recipients, have income, and already be on the NYCHA waiting list. Shelter families are being moved into NYCHA and Section 8 housing at half the rate homeless advocates recommend. Simultaneously, more and more families are in need of housing support.

Housing New York 2.0: In 2014, De Blasio announced Housing New York 2.0, a goal to build and allocate 300,000 units for affordable housing by 2026. The policy does address a major cause of family homelessness in New York, however, the results do not reflect that. Coalition for the Homeless reports that Housing New York 2.0 split the city housing market into a dichotomy of affordable and luxury homes, with few options for the city's poorest. 20% of funds for Housing New York 2.0 are allocated for units with rents exceeding \$2,000 per month. 50% of units created by the program cost between \$750 and \$1,500 monthly, leaving only a sliver of units for those most in need. The lack of affordable housing is evident in the juxtaposition of vacancy rates. Lux apartments, with rents over \$2,000 per month have a 7.42% vacancy rate, while only 1.15% apartments costing less than \$800 per month are vacant.

Shortcomings

Bloomberg Administration

By 2013, family homelessness increased 80% from 2002 levels. Both HSP and advantage proved ineffective in addressing family homelessness, as neither program addressed the root cause of family homelessness: lack of affordable housing. Additionally, significant barriers to entry prevented either program from being effective. HSP's requirement that beneficiaries receive welfare excluded working poor families. Advantage's work requirements, and both program's shelter history requirements, also prevented otherwise eligible families from participating.

De Blasio Administration

Simply put, Mayor De Blasio's policies to address homelessness are not ambitious enough to reduce the number of homeless families in New York. Unlike Bloomberg, De Blasio's approach to housing policy does address the lack of affordable housing in New York. However, not enough units are being allocated for low income housing. The rate at which New York families are entering low-income brackets, unemployment, and even homelessness, far exceeds the rate at which New York families are overcoming these conditions. LINC has also proved to be less efficient than possible due to its high barriers to entry, which prevent families in need from benefiting from public housing subsidies. The De Blasio Administration has begun to take a few steps in the right direction, but its goals to end homelessness can not be supported by its meager efforts to address the growing rates of homelessness in New York City.

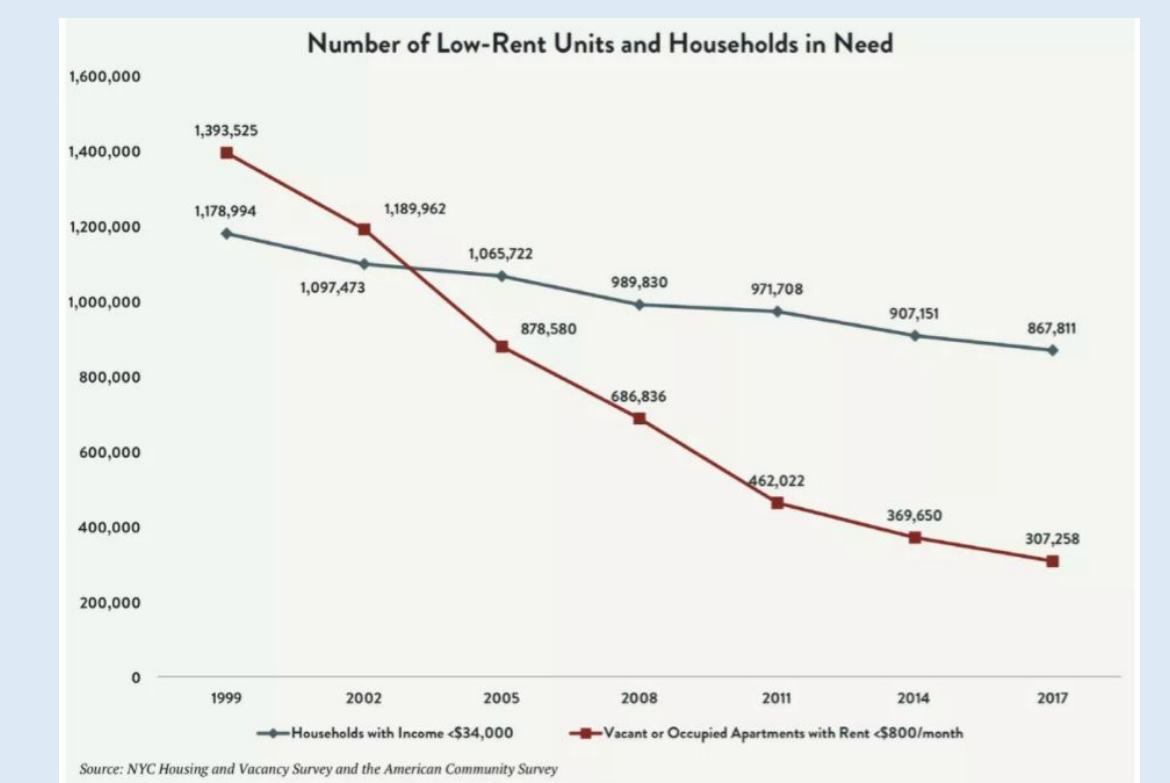


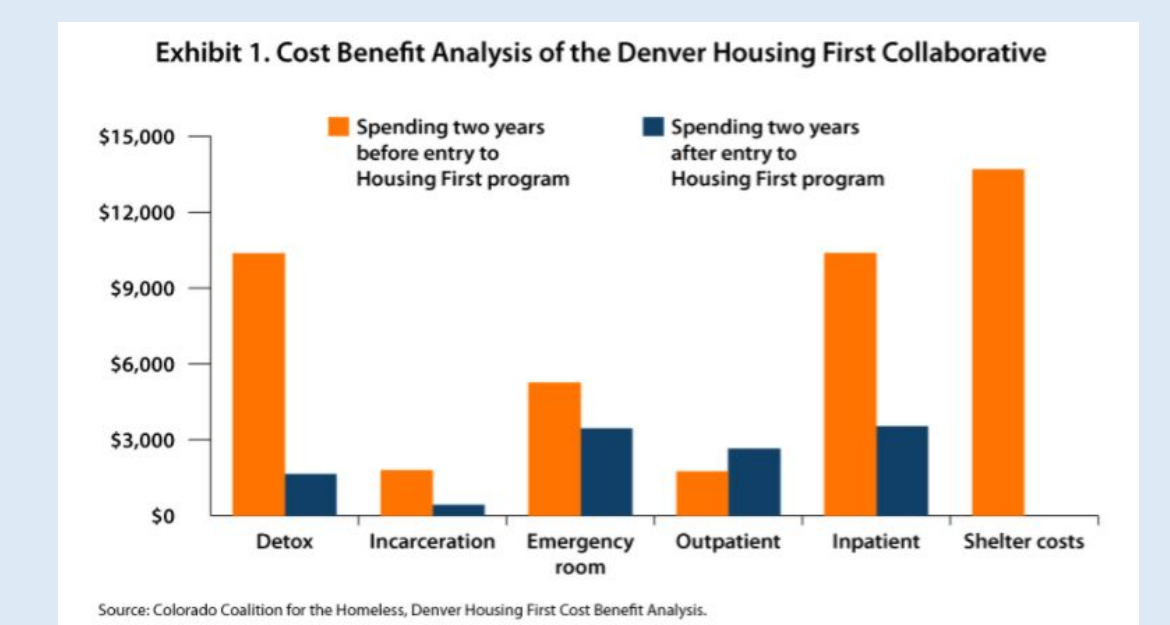
Figure 4. [Graph illustrates the diminishing supply of housing units with rent under \$800 per month]. *Coalition for the Homeless*. Retrieved from https://www.coalitionforthehomeless.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/TaleofTwoHousingMarkets_FINAL.pdf

Policy Proposal: Housing First

- Give shelter families access to permanent supportive housing without barriers to entry, like sobriety or a source of income, which preclude some of the families most in need from finding stable housing.
- Provide *voluntary* supportive services to program participants, including child care, counseling, and medical services.
- Beneficiaries pay 30% of their income in rent.
- Allocate program funds for the development of units specifically for homeless families. This will prevent the emergence of a split housing market, as resulted from De Blasio's Housing New York 2.0.
- Beneficiaries sign leases with full legal rights, and access to legal protection services.
- Permanent supportive housing as provided by the Housing First Model is proven to result in more stable housing placements, and costs less per household served than other transitional housing approaches.

Figure 5 illustrates the cost savings from the implementation of the Housing First model in Denver, Colorado. By eliminating preliminary requirements to receiving housing, and providing social services to those the city's Housing First program beneficiaries, the city averaged \$4,745 in savings per person.

Figure 5. [Graph illustrates costs savings of housing first model per household in Denver]. *The Commonwealth Fund*. Retrieved from <https://www.commonwealthfund.org/publications/new-sletter-article/2014/oct/colorado-coalition-homeless-model-supportive-housing>



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