

Briefing Paper

A Growing Crisis for Single Adults

A Growing Crisis for Single Adults: Supportive Housing Placements Decline as Homelessness Among Single Adults Remains High

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This year, the number of single adults in New York City without homes has tragically reached an all-time high. More than 14,200 adult men and women are sleeping in homeless shelters tonight, with thousands more bedding down in doorways, subway stations and other public spaces. Many face extraordinary challenges, including severe mental illness, addictions, and disabling medical conditions – all exacerbated by the instability that comes with homelessness.

While many factors contribute to an individual ending up on the streets or in a shelter, the reason that mass homelessness among single adults in NYC has been increasing so persistently is not complicated: **There is simply not enough affordable housing – particularly permanent supportive housing**, which provides on-site medical and psychiatric services for homeless people with mental illness and other disabilities. This model, which has been in practice for the past three decades, is proven to stabilize homeless people for the long-term, save taxpayers more than \$10,000 per year for each household placed into housing, and increase property values in the communities in which it is developed.

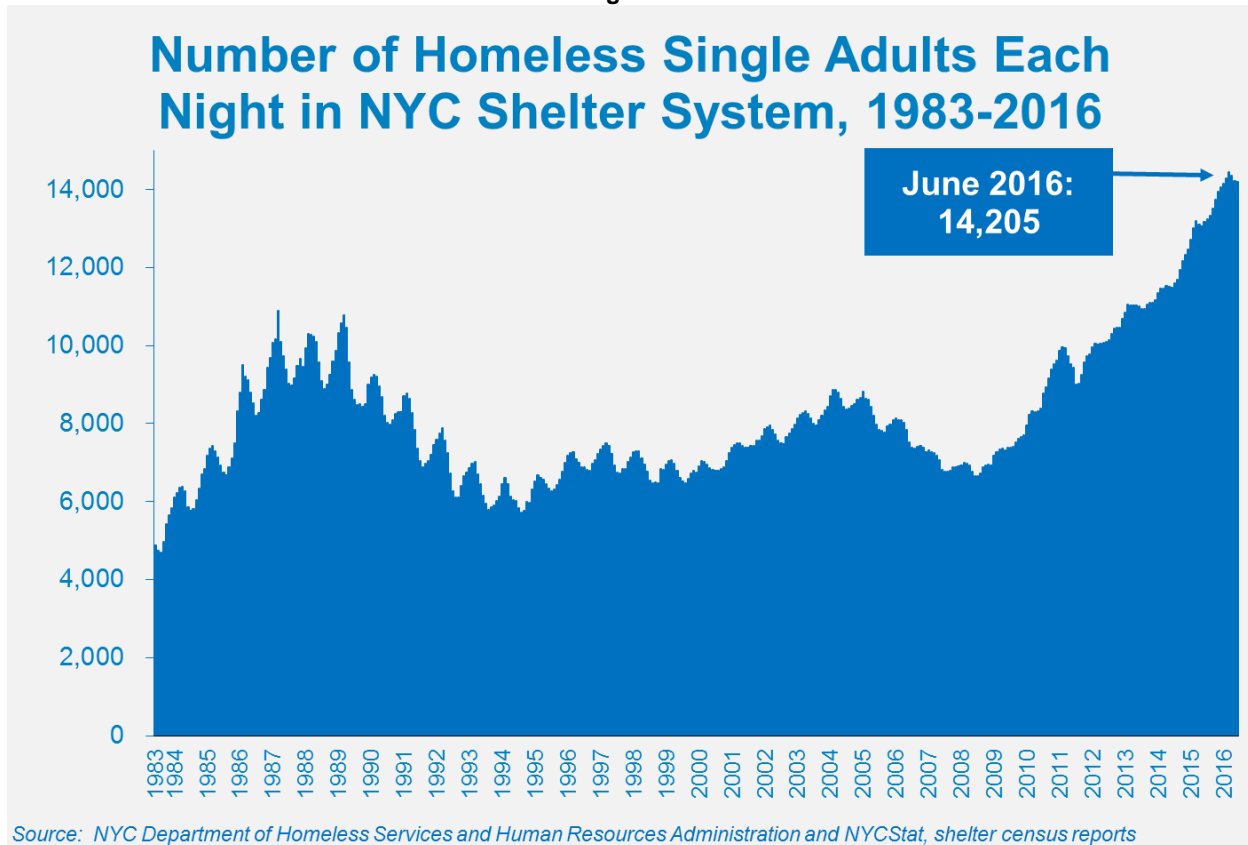
To date, the creation of most of the supportive housing in NYC has been funded under a series of multi-year City-State agreements referred to as the “New York/New York Agreements” – the third of which expired this year. Currently, *less than one in five eligible homeless applicants for supportive housing will find an available unit, highlighting the urgent need for more units.* This historic crisis in the availability of supportive housing has resulted in extended periods of homelessness among single adults, particularly for those with the most serious disabilities.

Following recent commitments from both Mayor de Blasio and Governor Cuomo to create 35,000 units of supportive housing over the next 15 years – 15,000 from the City and 20,000 from the State – the work of actually producing and opening units must begin immediately, even in the absence of a formal NY/NY agreement. The City has made progress on its commitment, as described in more detail below, but the State continues to drag its feet. The \$2 billion allocated for affordable and supportive housing in the FY 2017 State Budget sits largely unspent, and Governor Cuomo has thus far refused to make good on his promise to fully fund the first 6,000 supportive housing units.

Beyond the moral and civic necessity of creating tens of thousands of supportive housing units for the most vulnerable homeless New Yorkers, the State and City must immediately take further steps to address record homelessness. These should include the provision of additional housing subsidies for those who do not need the comprehensive services offered by supportive housing, and improving State-City cooperation with respect to the populations that experience homelessness because of an inability to access mental health care or following institutionalization in State correctional and psychiatric facilities. In order to combat the growing crisis of homelessness among single adults, both Governor Cuomo and Mayor de Blasio must take the following immediate steps:

- ***Governor Cuomo must immediately execute a required Memorandum of Understanding to release the full \$2 billion included in this year's State budget to support the creation of the first 6,000 supportive housing units of his 20,000-unit commitment. To date, a mere \$150 million has been released – not nearly enough to produce a steady and adequate supply of new supportive housing units.***
- ***Both the City and State must work to open new scattered-site supportive housing units as quickly as possible, and prioritize those single adults with the greatest and most urgent needs.***
- ***New York State must partner with New York City to address barriers to critical mental health programs and prisoner re-entry. Both are significant drivers of homelessness among single adults. Both the State and City should increase their investments in support services and shelter for homeless adults involved in multiple systems, who tend to stay homeless for long periods of time and use a costly array of services.***
- ***New York City should increase the number of housing subsidies it provides to homeless single adults, and simultaneously aggressively fight unlawful source-of-income discrimination that prevents individuals from utilizing their vouchers to move out of shelters.***

Figure 1



Background: Homeless Single Adults in New York City

In February 2013, the number of single adults living in New York City homeless shelters surpassed the previous 1987 record, when nearly 11,000 individuals were sleeping in shelters. Today, more than 14,200 individuals, including 10,400 men and 3,800 women, sleep in shelters each night (see Figure 1). This follows a steady upward climb that began in 2011 and is currently on track to continue throughout 2016 (Figure 2). During fiscal year 2015, more than 35,600 unique single adults slept in the municipal shelter system at some point (see Figure 3). Most troubling, seasonal decreases in the single adult shelter census that have historically occurred during the warmer summer months no longer regularly take place, with some summers continuing to show increases in the shelter population.

Upon closer examination, these trends are worrisome for two reasons. First, as can be seen in Figure 1, the census in the single adult homeless shelters over the past five years has been rising at a far greater pace than ever before. Second, while the number of homeless individuals sleeping in public spaces is nearly impossible to determine with any accuracy, the street homeless population historically has tracked the shelter census – that is, as one population increases, so does the other. The City must therefore concurrently address the skyrocketing numbers of both sheltered and unsheltered single adults.

Figure 2

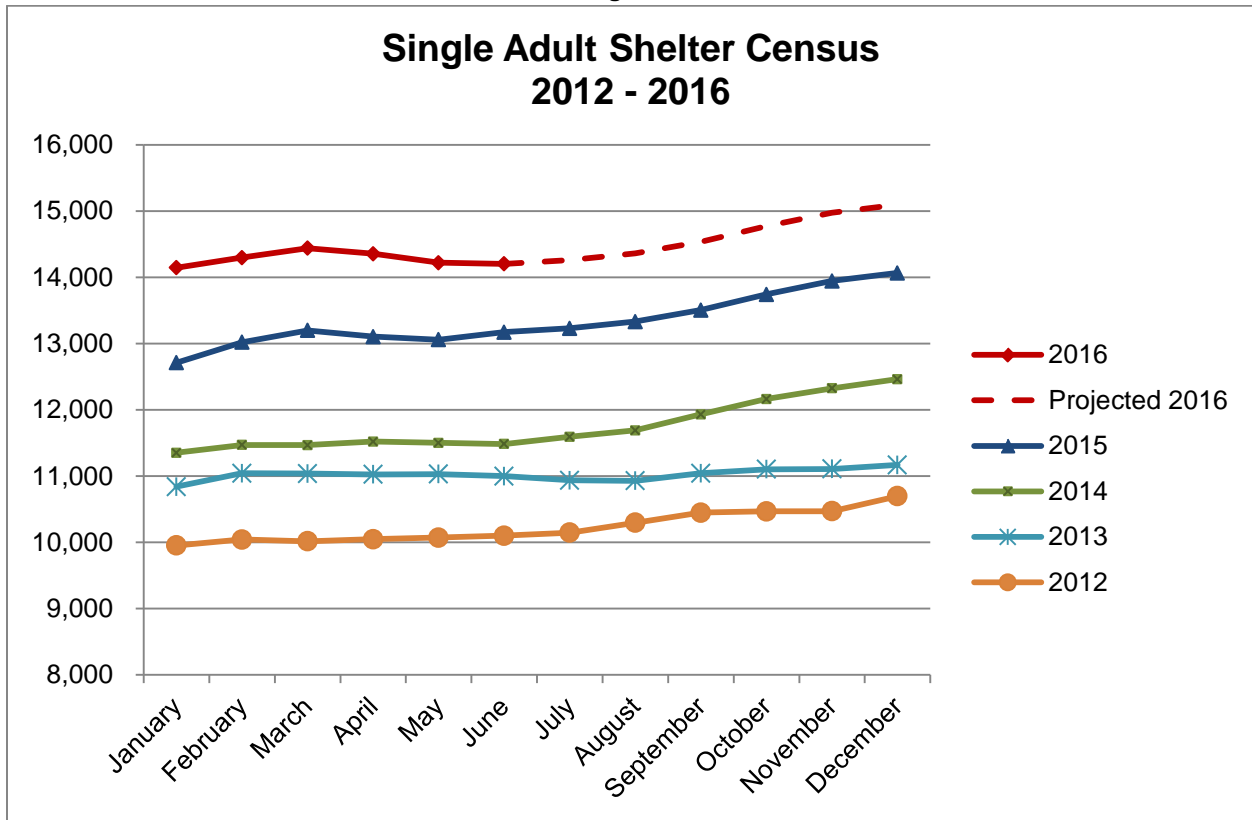
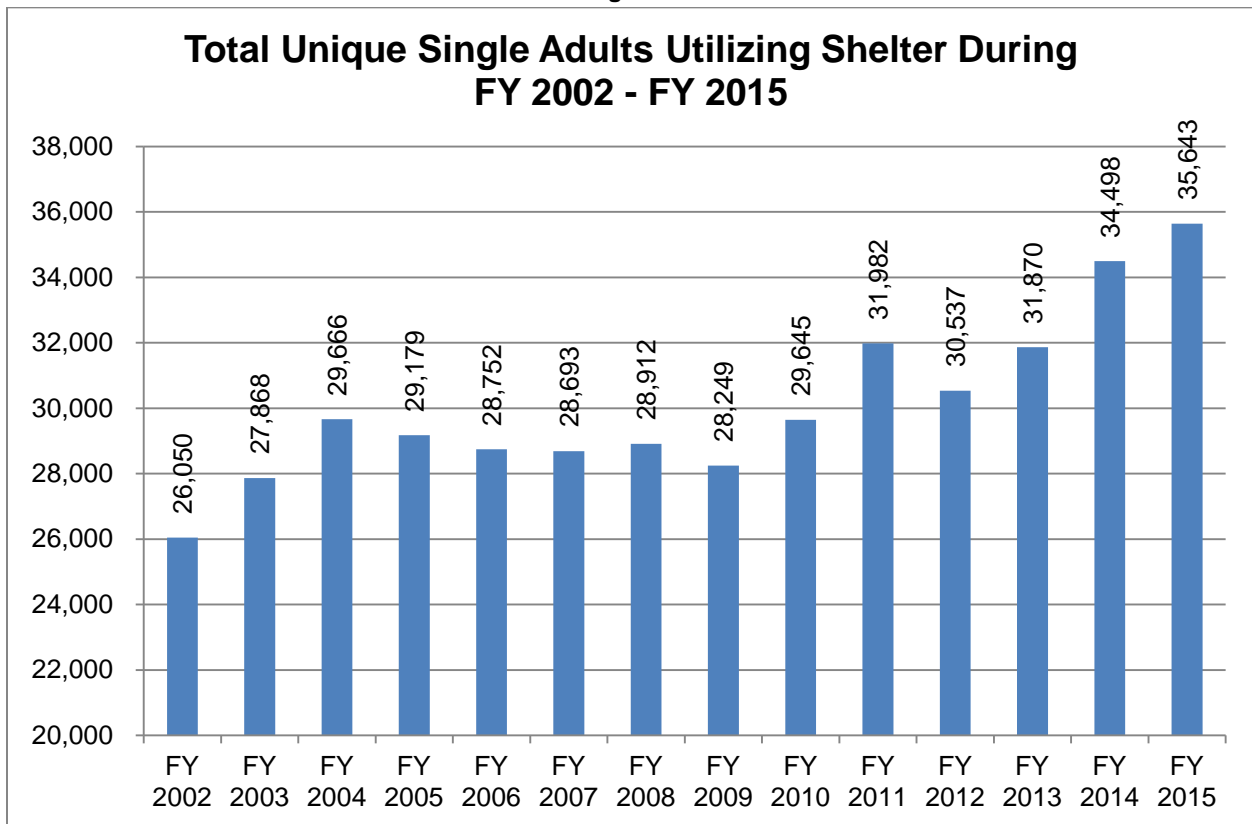


Figure 3



Homeless single adults in New York are not a homogeneous population, but some demographic groups are more likely to be affected by homelessness:

- Homeless single adults are much more likely to be between the ages of 45 and 64 (45 percent of all homeless single adults) compared with the general population in New York City (31 percent of all adults), and much less likely to be over the age of 65 (5 percent of homeless single adults versus 16 percent of the adult general population in NYC).¹ See Figure 4.
- Single adults experiencing homelessness are also far more likely to be people of color. Just 10 percent of homeless single adults are white (non-Hispanic), compared with over 30 percent of the general population in New York City,² while nearly 60 percent of homeless single adults are African American and 26 percent are Hispanic. See Figure 5.
- The best estimates show that at least one-third of homeless single adults experience severe mental illnesses or suffer from an addiction, or both.^{3,4} Half of the nation's homeless veterans suffer from serious mental illnesses⁵ as do most of those sleeping rough on the street. Indeed, nearly half of New York City's municipal women's shelter beds and over a quarter of men's shelter beds are reserved for people with mental health or medical needs, and these set-asides do not begin to meet the demand for specialized services.⁶

Figure 4

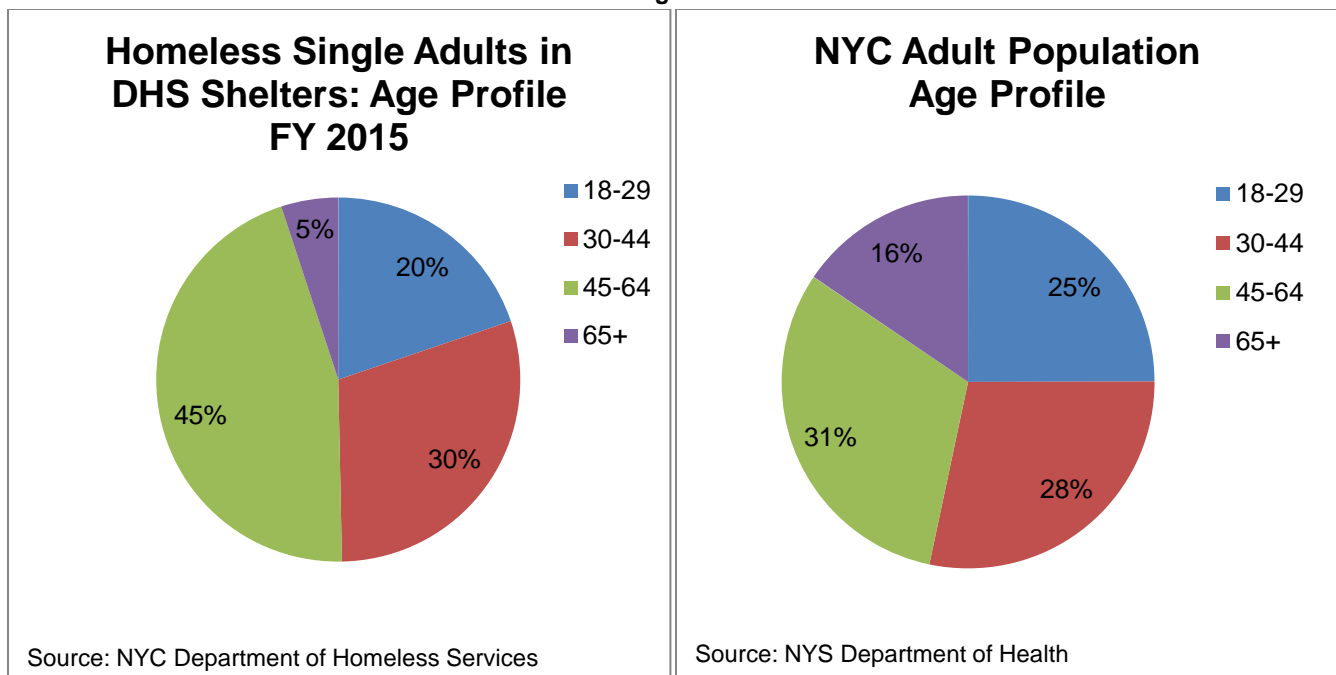
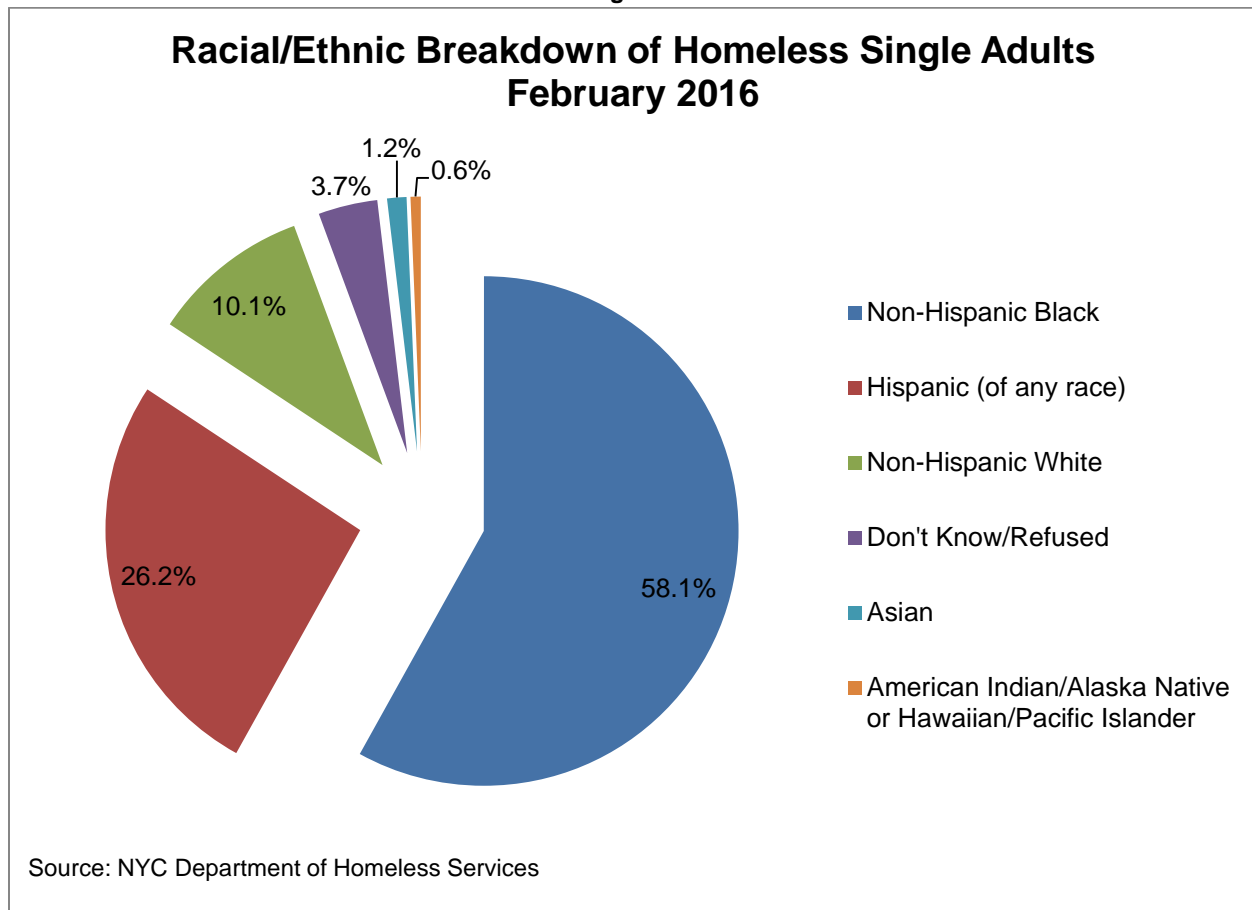


Figure 5



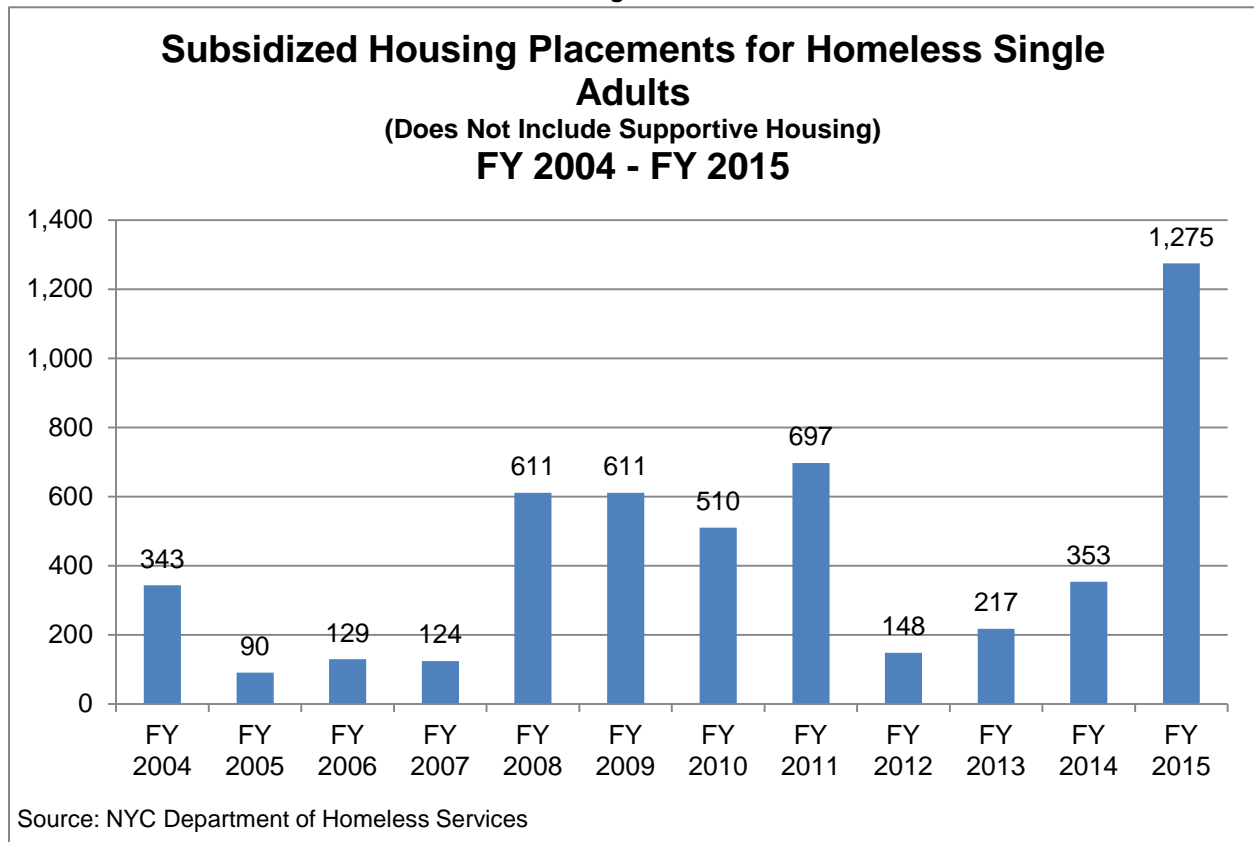
Homeless Single Adults: Trends in Shelter Utilization and Housing Placements

A closer look at shelter utilization and housing placement data for single adults further illuminates why the shelter census remains so persistently high even as the City is investing in more permanent housing options than ever before. First, the sheer number of people staying in shelters has grown so large that customary levels of housing assistance cannot have the same impact on shelter utilization that they once had for a vastly smaller shelter population. Indeed, the majority of single adults continue to exit shelter without assistance. Second, despite their increased availability, the City's new rent supplement programs have not been sufficient to suppress the growing shelter census among single adults due to the chronic shortage of available affordable units as well as illegal discrimination by landlords refusing to accept housing vouchers. Third, although the number of adults returning to shelters after having had a previous experience with homelessness is lower than it was a decade ago, the number of *new* shelter entrants continues to increase. Finally, the number of supportive housing placements has fallen in the past two years – an anticipated result of the dwindling supportive housing pipeline.

While new rent subsidy programs introduced by the City have not yet managed to reduce the number of single adults sleeping in shelter each night, it is worth noting that the past year has seen a marked increase in the number of shelter residents placed into permanent housing with the help of these

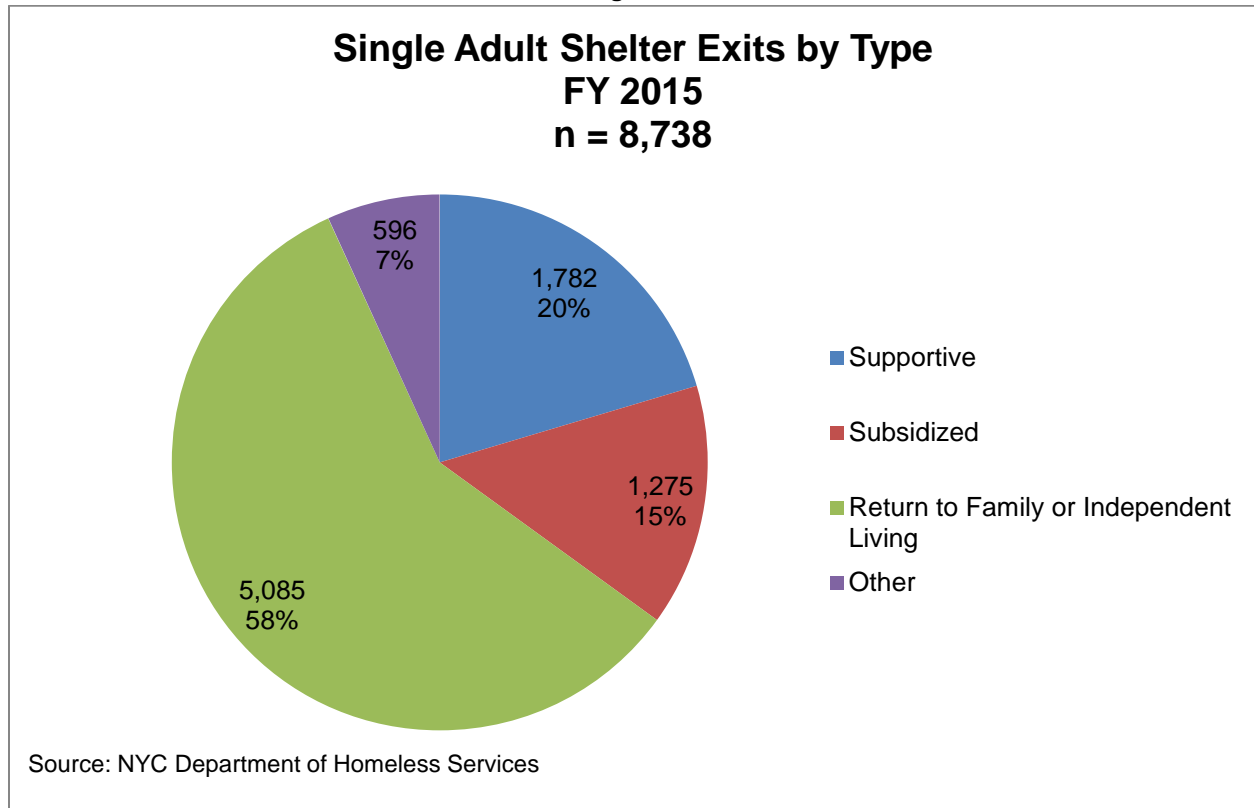
programs. This is a direct result of Mayor de Blasio's creation of the Living in Communities (LINC) and Special Exit and Prevention Supplement (SEPS) programs in 2014 and 2015. In fiscal year 2015, more than 1,200 single adults moved out of shelters with some form of rental assistance (not including supportive housing) – more than three times the number from the previous fiscal year (Figure 6). In fiscal year 2016, almost 1,600 single adults – about one-third more – were able to move into permanent housing with the assistance of LINC and SEPS alone.

Figure 6



Although there are more single adults leaving shelters with the help of a subsidy than at any time before, the majority of single adults still continue to leave shelters without any assistance at all (Figure 7). The lack of support for these individuals greatly reduces the likelihood of long-term housing stability, and thus makes a lasting reduction in the homeless population more difficult to achieve. Of 8,738 adults leaving shelters in fiscal year 2015, only 35 percent received a subsidy or supportive housing placement, while the remainder of adults either left shelters without assistance, or their destination was unknown. Additionally, thousands of homeless households holding the new rent subsidy vouchers still have trouble finding affordable apartments because of New York's exceptionally high housing costs and low vacancy rates, and because many landlords simply – and illegally – refuse to accept the vouchers.⁷

Figure 7



As discussed above, the relative proportions of new shelter entrants and the number of people returning to the shelter system have also changed notably in the past five years. In fiscal year 2015, the percentage of single adults re-entering shelters after a previous shelter stay reached its lowest point in four years. About 41 percent of single adults entering shelters had previous shelter stays, down from a high of 55 percent in fiscal year 2008 (Figure 8). But this percentage is still far too high, underscoring the need for increased investment in long-term permanent housing solutions for single adults. Furthermore, the number of *new* shelter entrants has been on the rise since fiscal year 2012 (Figure 9).

Figure 8

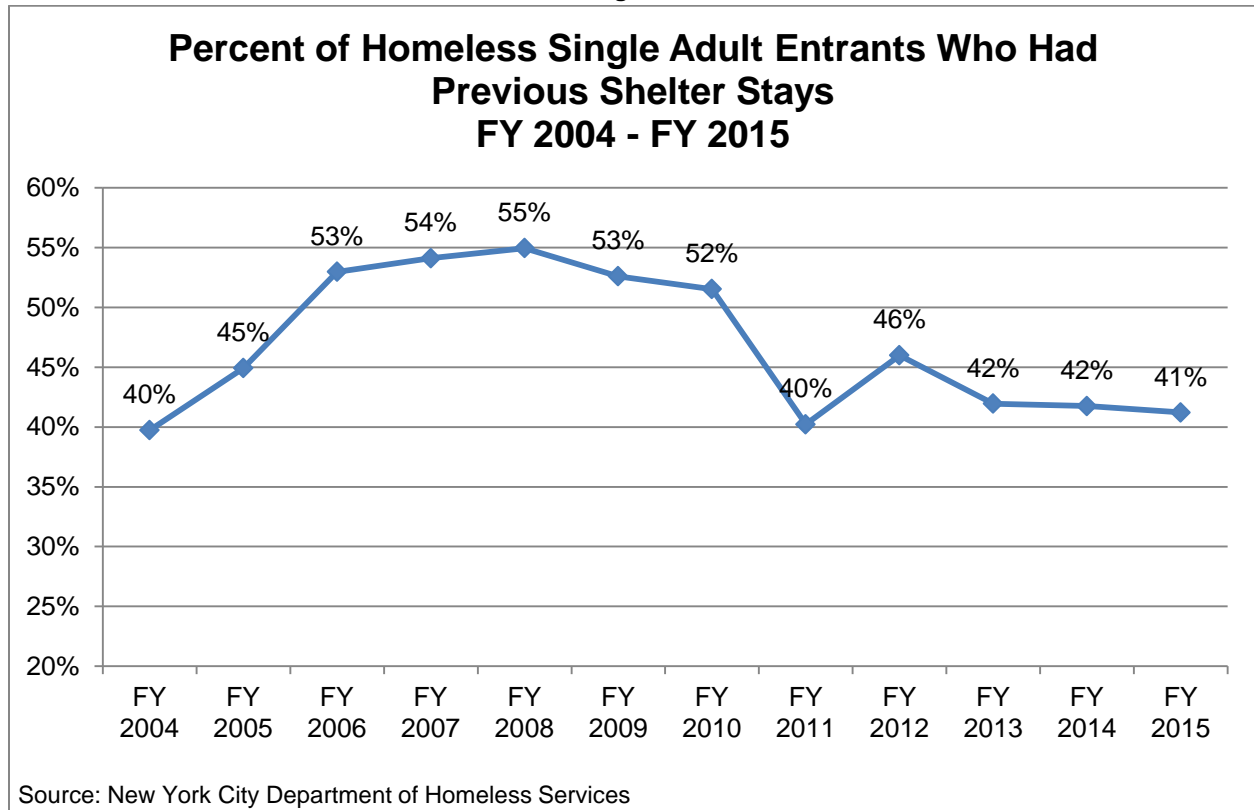
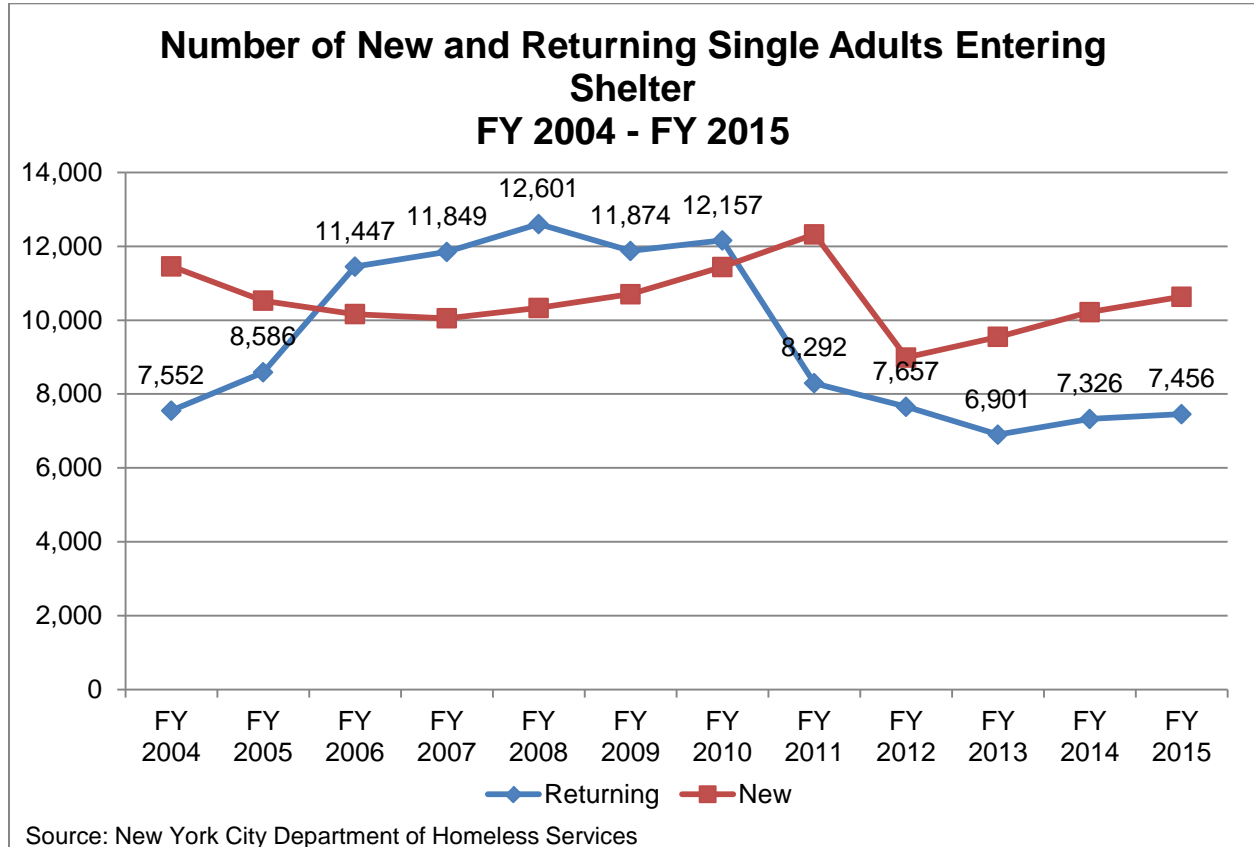
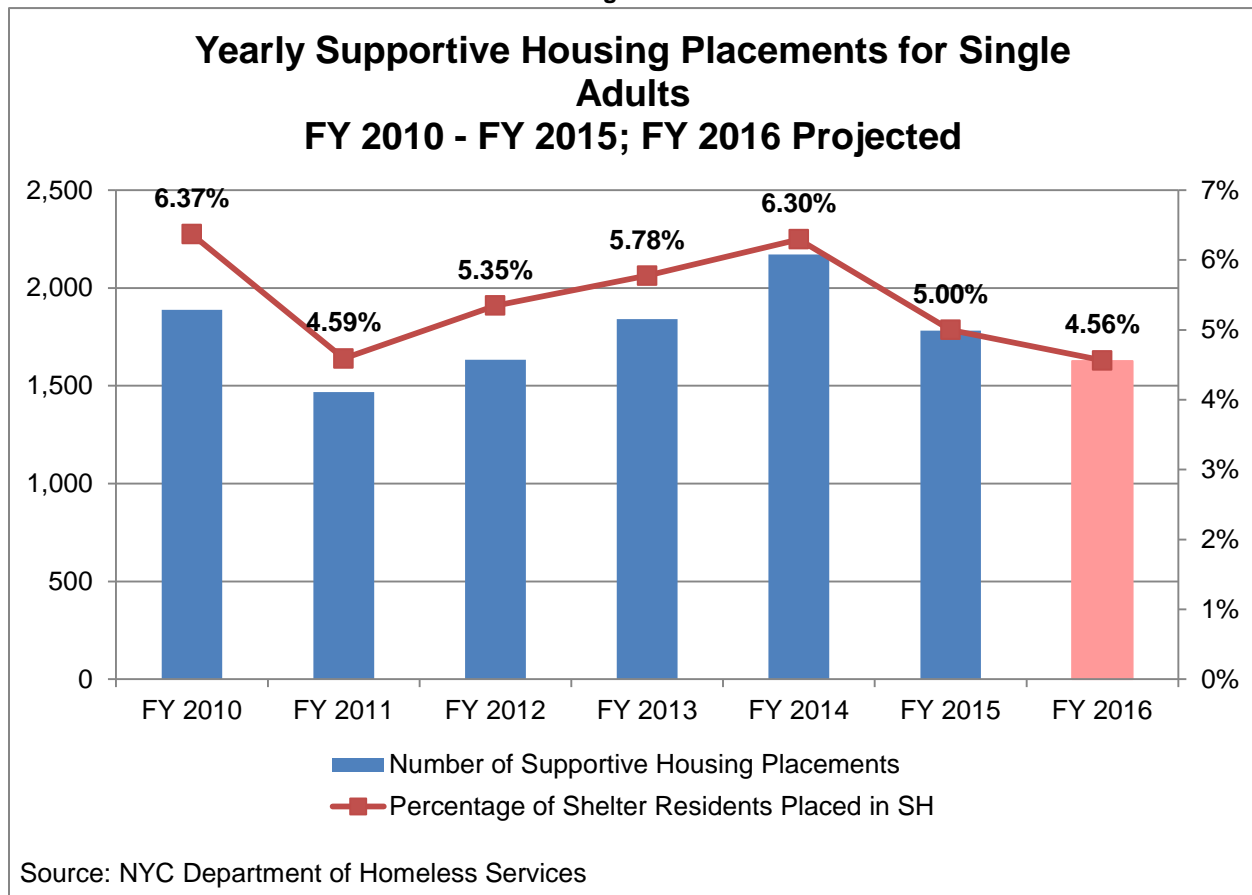


Figure 9



Despite the increase in the number of people leaving shelters with the help of subsidies, supportive housing placements have *declined* since fiscal year 2014, reaching a monthly low of just 104 placements in June 2015. The total number of placements in fiscal year 2015 fell below the previous year, and the monthly data for the first half of fiscal year 2016 suggest an even more dramatic decline ahead. An analysis of data from the first six months of FY 2016 indicates that supportive housing placements, as a proportion of homeless single adults in shelters, could drop to their lowest rates since at least fiscal year 2010 (Figure 10).

Figure 10



The number of supportive housing placements in August in each of the past three years is another useful benchmark to illustrate the recent decline. In August 2013, 202 single adults received supportive housing placements; in August 2014 there were 169 adults placed; and in August 2015 there were 106 (Figure 11). Showing a decline of nearly 50 percent, these statistics highlight the urgent need to codify and finance a long-term plan to build and operate tens of thousands of new units of supportive housing.

The overall lack of housing options available to homeless single adults in shelters has also resulted in an average length of stay that is now longer than ever: It reached a full 355 days in fiscal year 2016, an increase of 45 percent from fiscal year 2010 (Figure 12).

Figure 11

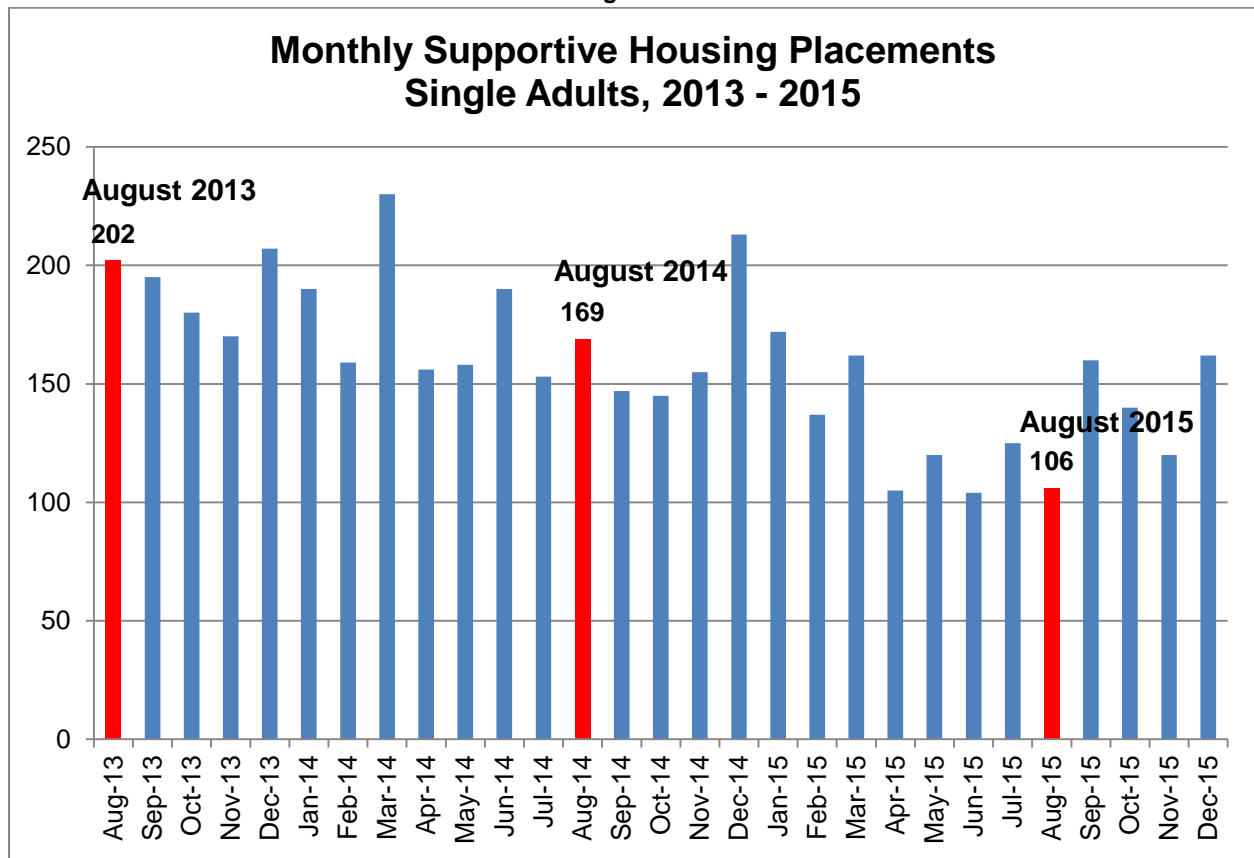
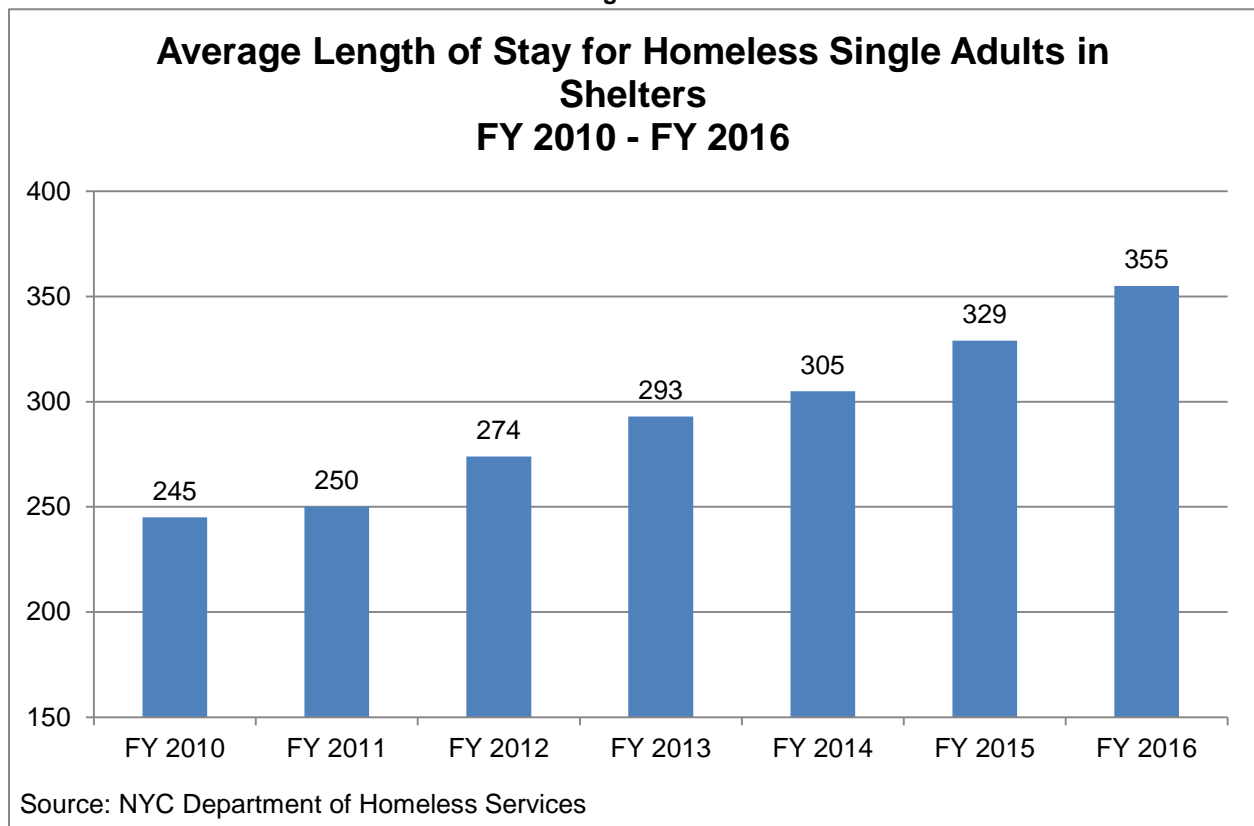


Figure 12



Supportive Housing Ends Homelessness

While undoubtedly intensified by the growing affordability crisis in New York City, homelessness among single adults is often the result of multiple factors, including serious mental illnesses, addictions, lack of access to mental health care or addiction treatment, involvement in the criminal justice system, and other individual disabilities.⁸ This is why housing with accompanying supportive services has, over many decades, become the most effective model for helping the most vulnerable people move out of shelters and off the streets, into homes of their own. Permanent housing enhanced with support services generates a net annual savings of more than \$10,000 per household – by reducing many homelessness-related costs for health care, shelters, and jails.⁹

New York City pioneered the model of supportive housing to rescue homeless people with severe physical and/or mental-health needs, and partnered with New York State to establish the successful funding model for planning and producing thousands of units of this invaluable housing. These efforts were branded “New York/New York Agreements.” The three such agreements launched since 1990 have successfully housed tens of thousands of homeless people. The last agreement was signed in 2005 and expired in June 2016.¹⁰

Two years ago, a coalition of advocates, service providers and supportive housing developers formed the Campaign 4 NY/NY Housing to urge Governor Cuomo and Mayor de Blasio to renew the decades-old collaboration between the State and the City and create 35,000 new supportive housing units statewide. Hundreds of organizations, members of the faith community, the New York City Council and three-quarters of the State Legislature – from both sides of the aisle – soon added their voices in support. In response to this unified cry for action, Mayor de Blasio and Governor Cuomo each finally agreed to fund a significant number of new supportive housing units over the next 15 years, albeit not as part of a joint New York/New York IV agreement.¹¹ Mayor de Blasio committed to fund 15,000 new supportive housing units in New York City over 15 years, while Governor Cuomo pledged to build 20,000 new supportive housing units statewide during the same period.

However, halfway through 2016, Mayor de Blasio’s and Governor Cuomo’s efforts to implement their respective commitments have diverged. Mayor de Blasio has provided operating funds to open 500 scattered-site supportive housing units (that is, units in pre-existing buildings) in fiscal year 2017, as well as capital funds to begin constructing the new units he pledged in November 2015. The figures in the City’s 2016-17 budget¹² indicate that we should expect to see homeless people with severe mental illnesses moving into new supportive housing units by the end of 2016.

In stark contrast to the progress at the City level, Governor Cuomo has yet to follow through on his much-heralded commitment to fully fund the first 6,000 units of State-financed supportive housing this year. Nearly all of the roughly \$2 billion in affordable and supportive housing funds appropriated in the 2016-17 State budget remains unspent, and the Governor has reached a stalemate with the Legislature on how to allocate the funds – repeating a disappointing scenario similar to that which occurred in 2014. Thus far, Governor Cuomo and the legislative leaders have failed to execute the Memorandum of Understanding required by their budget agreement as a prerequisite to releasing all of the funds. At the end of the legislative session, Governor Cuomo and legislative leaders released a paltry \$150 million of the \$2 billion as an initial step toward funding only the first 1,200 units – a sum that neither comes close

to addressing the scale of need, nor fulfilling the Governor's promise to fund the first 6,000 of the promised 20,000 new units this year.

Moreover, Governor Cuomo's plan includes no funds to support the creation of scattered-site units, and instead relies entirely on new capital construction. **This means that it will be at least two full years before a single new unit of State-funded supportive housing will be available to accommodate one of the 36,000 homeless individuals and families currently waiting for a supportive housing placement.**¹³

Recommendations

The data on homelessness among single adults paint an alarming picture, **but cannot begin to convey the profound suffering of over 14,200 single men and women sleeping in shelters every night and the countless others sleeping rough on the streets.** The demonstrated need for immediate action to ameliorate the ongoing crisis is no mere numbers game: The health, stability and safety of the tens of thousands of vulnerable New Yorkers hang in the balance. Government can, and must, do better.

New York City has correctly increased the number of housing subsidies available to help single adults move out of City shelters and into permanent housing. But the rising demand for shelter and stubbornly high homeless shelter census underscore the urgent need to bring the breadth, depth and speed of government housing-based solutions to a scale sufficient to meet the crisis.

Further, Governor Cuomo must move beyond grand public pronouncements and step up with real State resources. After promising 20,000 new units of supportive housing over the next 15 years and allocating nearly \$2 billion in this year's budget for affordable and supportive housing, he has thus far delivered only \$150 million for supportive housing. Nearly \$2 billion sits unused and in limbo, needlessly starving and stalling the promised supportive housing development pipeline.

Beyond the critical goal of quickly creating tens of thousands of supportive housing units for the most vulnerable families and individuals experiencing homelessness, the State and City must use additional strategies to address record homelessness. These should include the provision of additional housing subsidies for those that do not need supportive housing and improving State-City cooperation with respect to the populations that experience homelessness following their institutionalization in State correctional and psychiatric facilities, or as a result of their inability to access mental health care. In order to combat the growing crisis of homelessness among single adults, both Governor Cuomo and Mayor de Blasio must take immediate steps:

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For more information, please visit: www.coalitionforthehomeless.org

¹ See: https://www.health.ny.gov/statistics/vital_statistics/2010/table01.htm

² See: <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045215/3651000>

³ M. Burt and B. Cohen, "Differences among Homeless Single Women, Women with Children, and Single Men," *Social Problems*, vol. 36, no. 5, pp. 508-524, 1989.

⁴ CSH. Real Supportive Housing Need in New York State (2015). Available: <http://www.csh.org/2015/10/new-york-state-supportive-housing-need/>

⁵ See: http://nchv.org/index.php/news/media/background_and_statistics/

⁶ NYC Department of Homeless Services

⁷ See: <http://www.wnyc.org/series/long-way-home/>

⁸ M. Burt and B. Cohen, "Differences among Homeless Single Women, Women with Children, and Single Men," *Social Problems*, vol. 36, no. 5, pp. 508-524, 1989.

⁹ Levanon Seligson A, Lim S, Singh T, Laganis E, Stazesky E, Donahue S, Lanzara C, Harris TG, Marsik T, Greene CM, Lipton FR, Myers R, Karpati AM. (2013) New York/New York III Supportive Housing Evaluation: Interim Utilization and Cost Analysis. A report from the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene in collaboration with the New York City Human Resources Administration and the New York State Office of Mental Health.

¹⁰ See: <http://shnny.org/images/uploads/NY-NY-III.pdf>

¹¹ Campaign 4 NY/NY Housing: <http://www.nynycampaign.org/>

¹² New York City Office of Management and Budget, Supporting Schedules (p. 1093) and Capital Budget, available here: <http://www1.nyc.gov/site/omb/publications/finplan06-16.page>

¹³ CSH. Real Supportive Housing Need in New York State (2015). Available: <http://www.csh.org/2015/10/new-york-state-supportive-housing-need/>