

## **POLICY BRIEF**

**End Homelessness: Housing and Homelessness Crisis**

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## CURRENT POLICY

Ending homelessness is a challenging, complex issue. However, the lack of affordable housing is one of the primary reasons for homelessness. Many simply cannot afford the high cost of rent or mortgage payments, which leaves them with nowhere to go.

Homelessness is often a symptom of poverty. People living in poverty may not have the financial resources to afford housing or the necessities of life, such as food and healthcare. Homelessness can result from traumatic experiences or abuse, such as domestic violence or child abuse, leaving people with mental health issues and few resources to find stable housing. We can end homelessness. New York City has several policies and programs aimed at ending homelessness and housing issues. Here are some of the critical policies and initiatives:

1. **Affordable Housing:** The city is firmly committed to creating and preserving affordable housing. In 2014, Mayor Bill de Blasio launched the Housing New York plan, which aims to create 300,000 affordable homes by 2026. The plan includes various strategies, such as creating new affordable housing units, preserving existing units, and implementing new tenant protection measures. (Elmedni, B., 2018).
2. **Homeless Services:** The city has a comprehensive approach to addressing homelessness, which includes outreach and engagement services, shelter options, and supportive housing. The Department of Homeless Services (DHS) provides various services to help people experiencing homelessness, including street outreach, drop-in-centers, emergency shelters, and long-term supportive housing. The city also operates a rental assistance

program called CityFHEPS, which helps low-income families and individuals secure stable housing. ([www.dhs.gov](http://www.dhs.gov))

3. Tenant Protection: The city has implemented various measures to protect tenants from evictions and displacement. In 2019, New York State passed the Housing Stability and Tenant Protection Act, strengthening tenant protections and rent regulations. The law also provides tenants with more legal protections, including requiring landlords to provide a written reason for eviction. ([NY State Senate Bill S6458 \(nysenate.gov\)](https://www.nysenate.gov/legislation/bills/2019/S6458)).
4. Building Code Enforcement: The city has a robust system for enforcing building codes to ensure the safety and quality of housing. The Department of Buildings (DOB) is responsible for enforcing the New York City Construction Codes and Zoning Resolution. DOB inspectors conduct regular inspections of buildings to identify violations and issue fines or orders to correct any problems.

Overall, New York City has put in place several policies and programs to address homelessness and housing issues, such as affordable housing, homeless services, tenant protection, and building code enforcement. However, the city continues to face significant housing affordability and homelessness challenges, and policymakers are working to develop new solutions.

According to the Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Fiscal Year (FY) 2024 Annual Performance Plan and FY 2022 Annual Performance Report, here are some of the **strategies** and **major milestones** that are in place to reduce homelessness:

Strategies	Major Milestones
<p><b>Prevent people from becoming homeless when they exit public systems, including but not limited to child welfare, prisons, and mental health institutions, through national and local partnerships.</b></p>	<p><b>12/31/2022:</b> Work with United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) to establish a working group that addresses system partners' (such as United States Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), United States Department of Justice, United States Department of Education, and the United States Department of Labor (DOL) role in preventing homelessness. – <i>Achieved as of 12/19/2022</i></p> <p><b>12/31/2022:</b> Publish lessons learned from the Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program on how to form valuable partnerships with public system partners, including child welfare and juvenile justice. – <i>Achieved as of 12/23/2022</i></p>

	<p><b>3/31/2023:</b> Roll out HOPWA "Homecoming" TA curriculum to support grantees efforts in housing, employment, organizational culture change, and reducing stigma to provide and maintain housing for low-income people exiting the justice system, including those living with HIV.</p> <p><b>9/30/2024:</b> Publish findings regarding best and promising practices on reentry housing learned, to date, through the Pay for Success Permanent Supportive Housing Demonstration.</p>
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**Improve retention in housing by improving access to affordable housing, healthcare, and other client-centered supportive services.**

**12/31/2022:** Coordinate across HUD on the Emergency Housing Voucher Program and the HOME-American Rescue Plan Program to create guidance on the intersection and braiding of programs to support communities in improving access to affordable housing. – *Achieved as of 8/31/2022*

**12/31/2022:** Disseminate materials to grantees further explaining client-centered approaches. – *Achieved as of 9/1/2022*

**12/31/2023:** Work with USICH and HHS to develop resources and strategies to address the intersection of healthcare and homelessness.

**9/30/2024:** Provide resources on partnering to CoCs and PHAs, including lessons learned from the Unsheltered Initiative, EHV, and how Moving On strategies can be used to promote housing stability.<sup>59</sup>

<p><b>Improve capacity of Continuums of Care (CoCs) to use existing data to measure and track system performance.</b></p>	<p><b>12/31/2022:</b> Enhance the Stella visualization tool to empower communities to visualize their homelessness data and conduct modeling exercises to improve the efficiency of their local resources.<sup>60</sup> – <i>Achieved as of 7/26/2022</i></p> <p><b>9/30/2023:</b> Disseminate TA resources to increase the understanding and utilization of Stella M.<sup>61</sup></p> <p><b>10/1/2023:</b> Update the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) data collection requirements for race, ethnicity, and gender identity based on input from relevant stakeholders, including people with lived experience, and provide training on</p>
	<p>how to collect this data in a trauma-informed and culturally sensitive way.</p>
<p><b>Identify opportunities to increase access to housing for Veterans who cannot be served by HUD Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) and Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF), through programs such as Emergency Housing Vouchers, CoCs, and Housing Choice Vouchers.</b></p>	<p><b>4/30/2023:</b> Implement approaches established in the HUD-VA Joint Strategies document by enhancing current HUD, VA and USICH coordination to reduce the total number of veterans experiencing homelessness.<sup>62</sup></p> <p><b>12/31/2023:</b> Release tools to support communities increasing access to housing for Veterans who cannot be served by HUD-VASH, SSVF, or other programs.</p>
<p><b>Improve community approaches—including getting contributions from those experiencing homelessness—to identify, engage, and re-house people experiencing unsheltered homelessness, including through a Housing First approach.</b> </p>	<p><b>12/31/2022:</b> Award new funds dedicated to addressing unsheltered homelessness with emphasis on engaging people with lived experience through a special Notice of Funding Opportunity. – <i>Achieved as of 2/2/2023</i></p> <p><b>12/31/2022:</b> Release tools on effectively collaborating with people with lived expertise in developing and implementing equitable solutions to reducing homelessness, including unsheltered homelessness. – <i>Achieved as of 9/16/2022</i></p> <p><b>9/30/2023:</b> Develop a comprehensive TA strategy to support communities awarded funding through the Special Unsheltered and Rural Homelessness NOFO.</p> <p><b>9/30/2024:</b> Initiate research and evaluation on strategies to address unsheltered homelessness.<sup>63</sup></p>

<p><b>Reduce the average length of homelessness through improved coordinated entry system implementation and targeted homeless programs.</b></p> <p></p>	<p><b>9/30/2022:</b> Convene three regional workshops on addressing post-disaster homelessness issues with inter-agency partners including the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), State Emergency Management Agencies, State governments, HUD funded Continuums of Care, and HUD divisions. – <i>Achieved as of 12/15/2022</i><sup>64</sup></p> <p><b>9/30/2022:</b> Assist communities through technical assistance and by issuing guidance to implement and improve coordinated entry systems based on lessons learned that involve more race equity and client-focused approaches.  – <i>Delayed to 3/31/2023</i><sup>65</sup></p>
	<p><b>9/30/2023:</b> Publish proposed Emergency Solutions Grant Rule for public comment.<sup>66</sup></p> <p><b>9/30/2023:</b> Publish proposed CoC Program Rule for public comment.<sup>67</sup></p> <p><b>9/30/2024:</b> Produce resources on coordinated entry assessment processes, focused on promoting racial equity and tailoring to local priorities.</p>

On December 19<sup>th</sup>, 2022, the Biden-Harris Administration put out a release from their *All In: The Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness*, which sets a lofty but attainable goal of reducing homelessness by 25% by 2025. The plan is the administration's most ambitious effort to prevent people from becoming homeless, address inequities that disproportionately affect underserved communities, including people of color and other marginalized groups, and assist cities and states in reducing unsheltered homelessness. President Biden said, “My plan offers a roadmap for not only getting people into housing but also ensuring that they have access to the support, services, and income that allow them to thrive. It is a plan that is grounded in the best evidence and aims to improve equity and strengthen collaboration at all levels.” The All-In plan, built during the Obama-Biden Administration in 2016, was

implemented to prevent and reduce homelessness, including strategies that led to the drop in homelessness between 2010 and 2016. Unfortunately, during 2016 and the beginning of the pandemic a reversal of progress and a lack of focus on evidence-based strategies, and homelessness increased by 6%. In response to the major increase in homelessness during the COVID-19 pandemic, led the Biden Administration put the American Rescue Plan in place c recovery. **H.R.1319 - American Rescue Plan Act of 2021**; this bill provides additional relief to address the continued impact of COVID-19 (i.e., coronavirus disease 2019) on the economy, public health, state and local governments, individuals, and businesses.

(<https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/1319>). Despite COVID-19, the American Rescue Plan avoided further increases in homelessness. The American Rescue Plan also helped vulnerable families to avoid eviction through the Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP). It was reported in the statement that over 8 million payments were used to aid individuals that were facing evictions, rental, or utility assistance.

In addition, the *House America* initiative, through the American Rescue Plan, gave leverage to finding permanent housing for more than 100,000 people that were experiencing homelessness, and it added more than 20,000 public housing units by the end of December 2020.

Early this year, the White House will partner with the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) and begin working with cities and states that will receive:

- **Full-time federal assistance:** A community response team that will execute strategies over two years to reduce unsheltered homelessness. The task will comprise federal experts, including leadership from USICH, who will work with elected and local leaders, homeless service providers, and people who have experienced homelessness.

- **Maximum flexibility and regulatory relief:** The community response team will release reports of the problems. The USICH will implement a task force to identify solutions and ameliorate the bureaucratic red tape.
- **Technical support and additional capacity:** The federal government will provide aid to participating communities to utilize and analyze all data.
- **Volunteer support:** Agencies will provide volunteers for outreach to the homeless and have peer-to-peer networks to exchange best practices and approaches. ([FACT SHEET: Biden-Harris Administration Announces Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness | The White House](#)).

## PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

Homelessness and the housing crisis are complex issues that must be addressed in a multifaceted manner. Here are some ideas for ending homelessness and resolving New York's housing crisis:

1. **Increase affordable housing:** Create more affordable housing units to address the housing crisis in New York. This can be done through public-private sectors, tax incentives, and the use of government subsidies. Put in place rent policies to prevent rent increases and provide stable housing for low-income residents.
2. **Supportive housing:** Supportive housing combines affordable housing with social services like mental health care and job training.
3. **Address systemic issues:** Many people experiencing homelessness in New York face systemic issues like poverty, unemployment, and insufficient healthcare. Confronting these issues through social services, job training, and healthcare

access can help prevent homelessness and support those experiencing homelessness in finding stable housing.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic shutdown up to today, there have been many businesses that did not recover, leaving behind available commercial real estate and empty office buildings. The use of these properties could house thousands of sheltered and unsheltered people. On January 9<sup>th</sup>, 2023, Mayor Adams unveiled recommendations from a city-led task force to facilitate the conversion of underused office space into new housing for New Yorkers. “With this study, we have a roadmap to deliver on a vision for a more vibrant, resilient, prosperous, and affordable city,” said Mayor Adams.” He continued, “the need for housing is desperate, and the opportunity offered by underused office space is clear; we know what we must do.” <https://www.nyc.gov/office-of-the-mayor/news/022-23/mayor-adams-recommendations-convert-underused-offices-homes>.

The New York Housing Conference (NYHC) Executive Director, Rachel Fee said, that “the policies NYCH is currently championing are bigger than HUD budget, as well as the Section 8 Rental Assistance Program, which she defines as an “important tool in fighting homelessness.” (Ting-Morton, 2023).

Ending homelessness and solving the housing crisis in New York requires a comprehensive and collaborative approach that addresses the root causes of homelessness and provides individuals with the resources they need to maintain stable housing.

## **KEY ORGANIZATIONS & INDIVIDUALS**

Research shows that the primary cause of homelessness, particularly among families, is the lack of affordable housing. “In the City Fiscal Year 2022, the average stay

in the DHS shelter system was 509 days for single adults, 534 days for families with children, and 855 days for adult families (parent caring for an adult child with physical/mental challenges). Here are a few organizations and individuals that can advocate joining in the fight to end homelessness and dismantle the housing crisis.

- Nonprofit Organization, Breaking Ground Social Service. President and CEO, Brenda Rosen.
- New York Housing Conference, Executive Director, Rachel Fee
- New York City Department of Social Service, Commissioner, Steven Banks.
- New York Civil Liberties Union, Executive Director, Donna Lieberman.

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[Mayor Adams Unveils Recommendations to Convert Underused Offices into Homes | City of New York \(nyc.gov\)](#).

**The White House Press Release.** (December 19<sup>th</sup>, 2022). (FACT SHEET: Biden-Harris Administration Announces Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness | The White House).

