

Policy Brief

Madeline McFernan

SWK355/ Professor Herrera

There is a housing crisis currently taking place in the US that is affecting millions of Americans daily, with the number increasing each day. The housing crisis has made homelessness a national problem. In New York City alone, it is estimated that one in 120 New Yorkers are experiencing homelessness daily. Attempting to find adequate shelter and basic daily needs has become a struggle for those suffering from this housing shortage. There are also an estimated 3,400 people residing in homeless shelters, with the numbers increasing daily (Bowery). New bills and policies are being presented and discussed by Congress in an attempt to address the increasing number of people not able to afford housing. To understand and help fix the housing crisis, we must first understand the root causes of homelessness. One of the primary causes of homelessness in New York City is the lack of affordable housing. The cost of living has dramatically increased, while wages have remained unchanged. This has made it difficult for middle and low-income residents to afford rent and sustain their families.

According to the Coalition for the Homeless, the primary cause of homelessness in New York City is the lack of affordable housing. Also, the amount of homeless people sleeping in shelters across the five boroughs is up by 39 percent; which is 112 percent higher than it was 10 years ago. Although there are other underlying causes, such as mental health issues, domestic violence, and loss of employment, the rising cost of rent, overcrowded housing units, and poor living conditions are contributing factors to the housing crisis in NYC. The housing crisis in New York City has had a devastating impact on residents. Families are being forced to choose between paying rent and other basic needs such as food, healthcare, and education. As more and more neighborhoods are gentrified and updated, local residents are being priced out of homes and apartments that have been in their families for generations. According to an article written in

the New York Times, rent prices have risen at least 31 percent between 2010 and 2018; these increases were seen before the Covid 19 pandemic.

To address this issue, policymakers should consider implementing measures that increase access to affordable housing. One way they can achieve this goal is by providing incentives for developers who build affordable housing units. Incentives could include tax breaks, subsidies, or reduced development fees. Additionally, programs like “Housing First” must be expanded throughout New York City. Housing First offers permanent supportive housing – which includes case management services - so individuals experiencing chronic homelessness can move into stable homes instead of staying on the streets or in shelters for prolonged periods. The organization, Volunteers of America, along with Mayor Eric Adams have created a pilot program; in this program, 80 participants with mental illness who are experiencing homelessness are given apartments. With on-site support, these participants will be able to gain stable housing which will reduce the number of homeless people on the streets (Brand).

This proposal came after Mayor Eric Adams proposed the involuntary hospitalization of homeless New Yorkers with mental health issues. As written in an article published by NPR, Mayor Adams, and his administration discussed stopping people from building shelters in subways despite having major budget cuts to social services that were provided by the city to the homeless population. In the month of March alone, at least 470 people were arrested for occupying public space as living arrangements. Although Eva Wong, the community mental health president, ensured proper training and protocols were being implemented, budget cuts and spending have been detrimental to those programs (NPR).

Expanding housing programs such as Section 8 is also crucial to addressing the housing crisis in New York City effectively. Section 8 and HUD programs provide vouchers to persons and families experiencing homelessness and provide incentives to landlords participating in the program. For example, a housing bill, S.1820, was passed that incentivized landlord participation in the Housing Choice Voucher program (Congress). This can vastly increase the number of affordable housing locations in the NYC area; this will allow landlords more certainty in allowing low-income tenants to rent out their properties and allow fewer apartments to remain vacant due to high rental costs.

Rental costs are too high, causing the middle and lower classes to struggle to make ends meet. With wages not meeting the cost of living, it is extremely difficult for families to provide adequate care and basic human needs. The housing crisis in New York affects millions of people, and if not rectified can lead to more and more people suffering from homelessness. I have seen firsthand how detrimental the rising rental costs have been to struggling families. Policymakers are not at the forefront of this housing crisis, social service workers and shelter volunteers are seeing how being unable to afford adequate housing has affected the mental health of many middle-class families. To address the housing crisis, policymakers must take bold action to invest in affordable home construction, expand rent stabilization laws, create mixed-income communities, and offer greater protections against eviction. These solutions require collaboration between government agencies, community groups, and private developers.

## References

*Basic Facts About Homelessness: New York City.* (2023, February). Coalition for the Homeless.

Retrieved April 11, 2023, from <https://www.coalitionforthehomeless.org/basic-facts-about-homelessness-new-york-city/>

Brand, D. (2022, November 15). NYC Pilots 'Housing First' Plan for Handful of Homeless Adults. *City Limits*. <https://citylimits.org/2022/11/15/nyc-pilots-housing-first-plan-for-handful-of-homeless-adults/>

*Congress.gov.* (2021, May 25). S.1820 - Choice in Affordable Housing Act of 2021.

<https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/senate-bill/1820>

Heyward, G. (2022, November 30). *NYC Mayor Adams faces backlash for move to involuntarily hospitalize homeless people.* NPR. Retrieved April 11, 2023, from <https://www.npr.org/2022/11/30/1139968573/nyc-mayor-adams-faces-backlash-for-move-to-involuntarily-hospitalize-homeless-pe>

*Homelessness is a Shared Experience in the New York Metro Area.* (2010). Bowery. Retrieved April 11, 2023, from <https://bowery.org/homelessness/#:~:text=How%20many%20people%20are%20homeless,one%20of%20the%20other%20boroughs.>

Vesley, K. (2018, August 24). The New High-Rent Districts. *The New York Times*.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/24/realestate/the-new-high-rent-districts.html#:~:text=According%20to%20a%20new%20report,some%20of%20the%20biggest%20ones.>