

*Uniting for Solutions Beyond Shelter* represents a first-ever effort to bring together the public, nonprofit, and business sectors in a coordinated campaign to address homelessness in New York City.

This 10-year action plan builds on the strengths of the current response to homelessness, which provides a wide range of services that help individuals and families get their lives back on track and move toward self-sufficiency. It also contains new principles and policy directions that will guide the city's response for the next decade.

*Uniting for Solutions Beyond Shelter* includes a nine-point action plan (see inside) that will reshape the city's approach to assisting homeless and at-risk New Yorkers. Collectively, the initiatives will:

-  Decrease the number of individuals living on city streets;
-  Decrease the number of people who need shelter through prevention efforts;
-  Increase the number of people leaving shelter for permanent housing;
-  Decrease the time that individuals and families remain in shelter;
-  Decrease the total number of people in shelters; and
-  Increase the supply of affordable, service-enriched, and supportive housing.

By incorporating the best thinking and ongoing contributions of the public, nonprofit, and business communities, as well as the involvement of concerned community members, *Uniting for Solutions Beyond Shelter* represents the potential to deliver significantly better outcomes to at-risk and homeless New Yorkers.

For more information or to get involved in efforts to overcome homelessness in New York City, visit [www.nyc.gov/endinghomelessness](http://www.nyc.gov/endinghomelessness).



**Uniting For Solutions Beyond Shelter**  
The Action Plan For New York City

**Executive Summary**



## 1. Overcome Street Homelessness 🦋 🍌

**Challenge:** While major progress has been made in reducing street homelessness in New York City, several thousand individuals remain on the streets and in other public spaces.

**Taking Action:** Restructured street outreach services, permanent and transitional housing models for chronically street homeless individuals, as well as strong accountability and evaluation mechanisms will decrease the number of people living on the streets.

### Making it Happen:

- Reconfigure outreach services
- Expand drop-in center, “housing first” programs, and low-demand shelter capacity
- Create neighborhood-by-neighborhood estimates and strategies
- Conduct annual street survey to measure progress and increase accountability for reducing street homelessness

## 2. Prevent Homelessness 🍌 🦋

**Challenge:** Thousands of individuals and families enter shelter each year without receiving homeless prevention assistance that might have saved or stabilized existing housing.

**Taking Action:** New and expanded community-based interventions, a focus on eviction prevention at housing court, and the use of data to identify at-risk households and deliver timely assistance will help many avoid homelessness.

### Making it Happen:

- Target prevention assistance to high-risk communities
- Revamp anti-eviction legal assistance to serve more households
- Ensure those receiving services participate fully

## 3. Coordinate Discharge Planning 🦋 🍌 🦋

**Challenge:** Many people enter shelter immediately or shortly after leaving correctional facilities, hospitals, or other institutional settings. For many of these at-risk populations, stable housing is key to recovery and/or successful integration back into their communities.

**Taking Action:** New commitments and increased partnerships among a range of city and state agencies will reduce the number of individuals and families leaving one system and entering another.

### Making it Happen:

- Coordinate with jails, prisons, hospitals, and mental health facilities to reduce shelter entries
- Coordinate with child welfare agencies to help families reunite in permanent rather than transitional housing and assist youth aging out of foster care

## 4. Coordinate City Services and Benefits

**Challenge:** By the time many individuals and families reach out for shelter, they have had extensive histories with other social service agencies and providers. Often, these agencies and providers do not share information, and some people are unaware of their eligibility for benefits that could provide critical assistance.

**Taking Action:** A coordinated, holistic approach to service delivery will help shelter residents and those at-risk to access and maintain benefits – a key step for individuals and families to gain independence and avoid future instances of homelessness.

### Making it Happen:

- Enhance collaboration among case workers at various agencies
- Introduce a “one-city” database to share information about the needs of individuals and families
- Expand technologies that enable individuals and families to access the range of benefits for which they are eligible

## 5. Minimize Disruption to Homeless Families and Children

**Challenge:** Families currently apply for shelter at the Emergency Assistance Unit in the Bronx. Dramatic increases in the numbers of families served in the office, as well as band-aid style efforts to ensure a workable intake process, have created difficulties for families and staff alike. Staff’s ability to effectively assess and address the needs of families in this environment is challenged.

**Taking Action:** Initiatives will reform the intake process, identify alternative assistance to help families avoid homelessness, and increase the likelihood that families will receive prompt shelter assignments in their home communities.

### Making it Happen:

- Increase prevention and other forms of emergency assistance at the EAU
- Streamline the application and eligibility review process
- Place homeless families into shelters in their home communities in order to minimize school disruptions for children and help parents remain connected to family and social supports

## 6. Minimize Duration of Homelessness

**Challenge:** Too many individuals and families remain in shelter for extended periods of time. In fact, the average family today spends nearly a year in shelter. Sixteen percent of the single adult population uses 50% of all of the resources.

**Taking Action:** For most, shelter should be used on an emergency, short-term basis. A range of strategies that reduce the average length of stay will be pursued.

### Making it Happen:

- Develop client monitoring tools and provider technical assistance to prevent long-term shelter stays
- Ensure shelter residents take all necessary steps to achieve independence and move toward self-sufficiency
- Prioritize housing resources for chronically homeless individuals and families on the streets and in shelter

## 7. Shift Resources into Preferred Solutions

**Challenge:** Despite the fact that shelters do not solve homelessness, a tremendous amount of resources are devoted today to supporting an extensive shelter network. Opportunities to shift these resources to interventions that solve homelessness, such as prevention, supportive housing, and rental assistance programs, are not maximized.

**Taking Action:** An analysis of existing funding streams will identify opportunities to redirect money now devoted to shelter to prevention, supportive housing, and other solutions. As prevention programs begin to reduce the shelter census, shelters will be closed. The resulting shelter savings will be used to fund additional prevention efforts.

### Making it Happen:

- Explore opportunities to redirect federal and state money to support prevention efforts
- Evaluate prevention programs and reinvest savings into those that work best
- Close shelters, or convert them to affordable or supportive housing, to reinforce savings

## 8. Provide Resources for Vulnerable Populations to Access and Afford Housing

**Challenge:** The City of New York is experiencing a profound shortage of available affordable housing. The demand for supportive and service-enriched housing for chronically homeless individuals, as well as rental assistance for at-risk populations, exceeds supply.

**Taking Action:** New rental assistance strategies, coupled with increased supportive housing resources for single adults and families, will help those at risk of homelessness gain stability. They will also help transition the most vulnerable homeless population from the street and shelters to permanent housing.

### Making it Happen:

- Coordinate rental assistance policy across city agencies
- Increase supply of supportive housing
- Increase supply of service-enriched housing

## 9. Measure Progress, Evaluate Success, and Invest in Continuous Improvement

**Challenge:** The city's approach to helping homeless people has been well resourced, but has not always benefited from quality improvement efforts based on data and emerging research.

**Taking Action:** Increasing the use of data to evaluate programs, while also taking greater advantage of the interest and goodwill of the research and academic communities, will help to identify best practices and improve outcomes for those receiving services. Goals and benchmarks for *Uniting for Solutions Beyond Shelter* initiatives will be created. Implementation updates will be routinely shared with the public.

### Making it Happen:

- Create benchmarks, measure progress, and evaluate success of initiatives
- Create and maintain a research advisory board
- Expand collaborations around multi-agency data analysis
- Invest in staff training and skills development