

# What Is New?

## Key Findings

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While the shelter census in New York City has stabilized over the last year, the number of families entering the system continues to grow—increasing by 33% between FY 2012 and FY 2015.

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More than one-quarter of the citywide increase in family shelter entry between FY 2012 and FY 2015 can be traced back to six of New York City's 59 neighborhoods—Mott Haven, Morrisania, East Harlem, Brownsville, East Flatbush, and East New York.

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The number of families in hotel shelter units grew by 20%—almost 400—twice the rate of growth of Tier II units.

(July 2014–December 2015)

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Over half of families in shelter had to apply more than once before eventually being found eligible for shelter, with 29% having to apply three or more times.

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The number of families immediately returning to shelter—within 30 days of exit—doubled in just one year, increasing from roughly 1,000 in FY 2014 to 2,000 in FY 2015.

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Half of all families exited shelter with no form of housing subsidy in FY 2015. One in five families who exited shelter without any form of housing subsidy returned to shelter within one year.

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# Introduction

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Homelessness in New York City continues to destabilize families and whole communities. While over 12,000 families—including 25,000 children—call a City shelter their home, the experience of housing instability and homelessness in New York City’s neighborhoods goes far beyond what shelter numbers alone show. In SY 2015–16, City schools identified four times as many homeless students as there were children living in shelter, and the current structure of the City’s shelter system is ill-equipped to meet the long-term stability needs of homeless children and families living both in and outside of the City’s family shelters.

The de Blasio administration released their new plan to address homelessness, *Turning the Tide on Homelessness in New York City*, at a critical time. Having now acknowledged the far-reaching negative consequences associated with homelessness and housing instability, the City faces an enormous challenge. The City’s homelessness crisis is the greatest threat to the well-being, health, and safety of children that the City has seen since the Great Depression. Homelessness places children at risk for developmental delays, trauma, educational setbacks, and poor physical and mental health; homeless parents face a dual burden of addressing their own housing and employment instability while also supporting their children through the experience of homelessness. While efforts by the de Blasio administration have maintained the monthly number of families living in shelter at roughly those of the year prior, these numbers mask the larger trend of growth in family homelessness.

## Growing Instability

Over 12,000 separate families with children entered shelter in FY 2015—a 23% increase from the year prior, and a 33% increase from 2012 when roughly 9,000 unduplicated families entered the system. Likewise, in just one year, the number of students experiencing homelessness jumped from roughly 86,000 to 105,000—a 22% increase. Housing instability is an ever-growing reality for families in New York City and the total number of families living in shelter has remained steady only as a result of the City’s push to increase shelter exits.

## The Revolving Shelter Door

In FY 2015, close to 9,000 families with children exited the shelter system—the equivalent of three-quarters of all families living in shelter that year. The push for families to exit shelter in order to make room for new families in need is a worthy goal; unfortunately, the majority of families entering shelter are the same families that previously exited the system. In a snapshot of families with children living in shelter in December 2015, only 19% had entered shelter for the first time that year—that is the equivalent of only about 2,500 of the more

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than 12,000 families in shelter. Homelessness in New York City has become a cycle of instability where families leave the system only to return again in the future. Alarming, this cycle is becoming more rapid. Between FY 2014 and FY 2015 the number of families who entered shelter due to immediately returning to the system doubled to almost 2,000. This rapid cycle of family homelessness is both costly to the City and detrimental to families—children suffer academically while parents struggle just to meet their family’s most basic needs due to the repercussions of housing instability.

In the midst of these disturbing trends, it is critical to recognize that the City’s family homelessness crisis was not created overnight. Twenty-five percent of families in shelter in December 2015 entered for the first time prior to 2002, and 45% entered between 2002 and 2014. The vast majority of families in the shelter system has been mired in this cycle of housing instability for years, if not decades. If we are to truly see a decline in the number of families experiencing housing instability and homelessness, breaking this cycle is critical.

How do we help families meet their needs for long-term stability both while they are in shelter and after they have left? Opportunities exist to re-envision New York City’s shelter system and transform shelters into places where families stay out of desperation, and simultaneously grow into stability; places that provide resources not only to sheltered families, but also to those in the community who are at risk of homelessness.

### **A Deeper Understanding**

In order to further the conversation about the factors that continue to drive New York City’s family homelessness crisis, the 2017 *On the Map: The Dynamics of Family Homelessness in New York City* provides analysis of citywide homelessness trends, as well as an in-depth look at local patterns. Building off the 2016 *On the Map: The Dynamics of Family Homelessness in New York City*, this updated publication goes beyond its predecessor by providing “snapshots” for each of the 51 City Council districts. *On the Map* is an easy-to-use resource for policymakers, budget analysts, service providers, community leaders, and organizations.

# Policy Considerations

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A growing number of families in the city struggle with chronic housing instability. Twenty-five percent of families in shelter in December 2015 entered for the first time prior to 2002, and 45% entered between 2002 and 2014. In other words, the vast majority of families in the shelter system have been mired in a cycle of housing instability for years or even decades. These families need more than a home—they need help to address the underlying reasons that they became homeless in the first place, such as underemployment, lack of education, rent burden, and family violence. The City’s family homelessness crisis was not created overnight. To truly see the tide turn, the status quo for approaching family homelessness must be altered.

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We must better support families before, during, and after homelessness to meet adult education and workforce development needs so that parents can find jobs that will provide economic stability. At the same time, we must ensure those jobs exist within New York City.

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Shelters could be leveraged as community resource centers to provide services to both the families who are currently homeless and those at risk of homelessness.

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Streamlining the application process so family eligibility is determined more efficiently would lessen trauma for children and would improve educational outcomes by reducing school absences.

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Resources that exist in communities can be tailored to address local factors driving family homelessness and housing instability. The exact needs of families in Brownsville will not be the same as those in Elmhurst. How can we work strategically to match existing local resources with neighborhood and family dynamics?

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