New York City Youth Homelessness System Map & Capacity Overview

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New York City Youth Homelessness System Map & Capacity Overview
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Background

On a single night in 2018, more than 4,500 unaccompanied and parenting youth were counted as experiencing homelessness. New York City (NYC) has the largest homeless population overall, compared to other cities across the nation, and the third highest number of unaccompanied youth. This represents thousands of young people every day who experience trauma and lack the stability and support they need to thrive. To address this challenge, NYC is taking steps toward a coordinated, system-level response to preventing and ending youth homelessness. This work has to begin with an understanding of the structure and capacity of the current system.

This document includes a map of NYC's youth homelessness system—including parts of it that are more aspirational than actual. The system map is an update of an earlier version used by the City. The map is followed by brief profiles with additional information on each of the key segments of the system, including *prevention*; *entry points*; *shelters, transitional housing, and temporary housing assistance;* and *stable housing*.

The system map itself provides a detailed depiction of different parts of the youth homelessness system and how they connect. The starting point, however, is the underlying notion that a comprehensive youth homelessness system involves more than crisis response. It also includes policies and interventions to prevent youth from experiencing homelessness on the "front end" of the system and to help youth achieve sustained housing stability and get on a path to thriving on the "back end."

This comprehensive approach to examining a youth homelessness system, depicted in the figure below, is consistent with the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) goals of ensuring that homelessness is rare, brief, and non-recurring. The USICH framework for ending youth homelessness also incorporates four core outcome areas—stable housing, permanent connections, education and employment, and social-emotional well-being. These are included in the system map as a reminder of the youth-level outcomes the system should be designed to improve.

This document is complemented by *A Youth Homelessness System Assessment for New York City,* a report based on a rapid mixed-methods assessment undertaken by Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago. The report provides a more detailed analysis of the strengths and limitations of the current system capacity and key opportunities for policy action.

A comprehensive approach to ending youth homelessness

Define the problem • Identify causes, risk & protective factors • Develop & test interventions
Scale-up evidence-based solutions • Monitor implementation

Source: Authors.

Prevention

Prevention can involve a range of actions, both before and during crises, to prevent youth from experiencing homelessness or entering homelessness services.

Structural policy actions to address root causes
(e.g., insufficient affordable housing, poverty, racial inequity, LGBTQ discrimination, social isolation, and family conflict and instability)

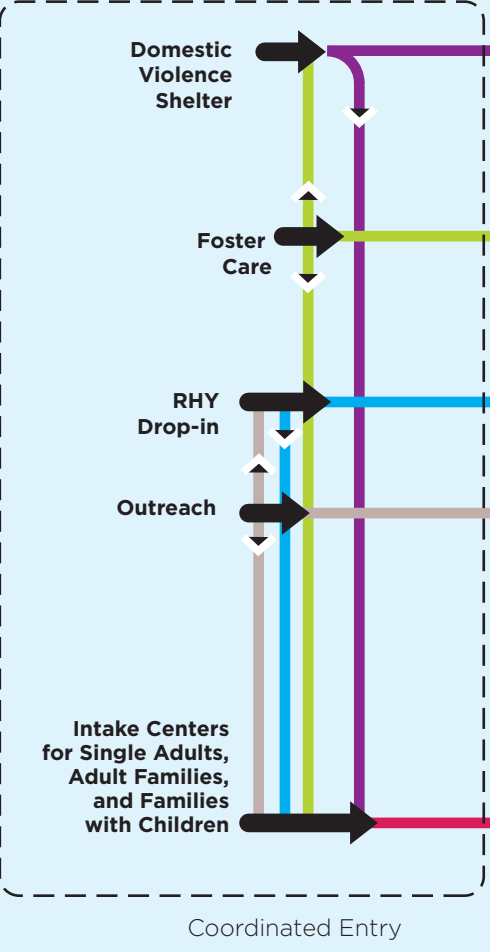**Cross-systems identification and service connection**
(e.g., behavioral health, child welfare, education, and justice systems")

Diversion
(Addressing immediate housing crisis--e.g., eviction prevention, legal services, family crisis and reunification services)
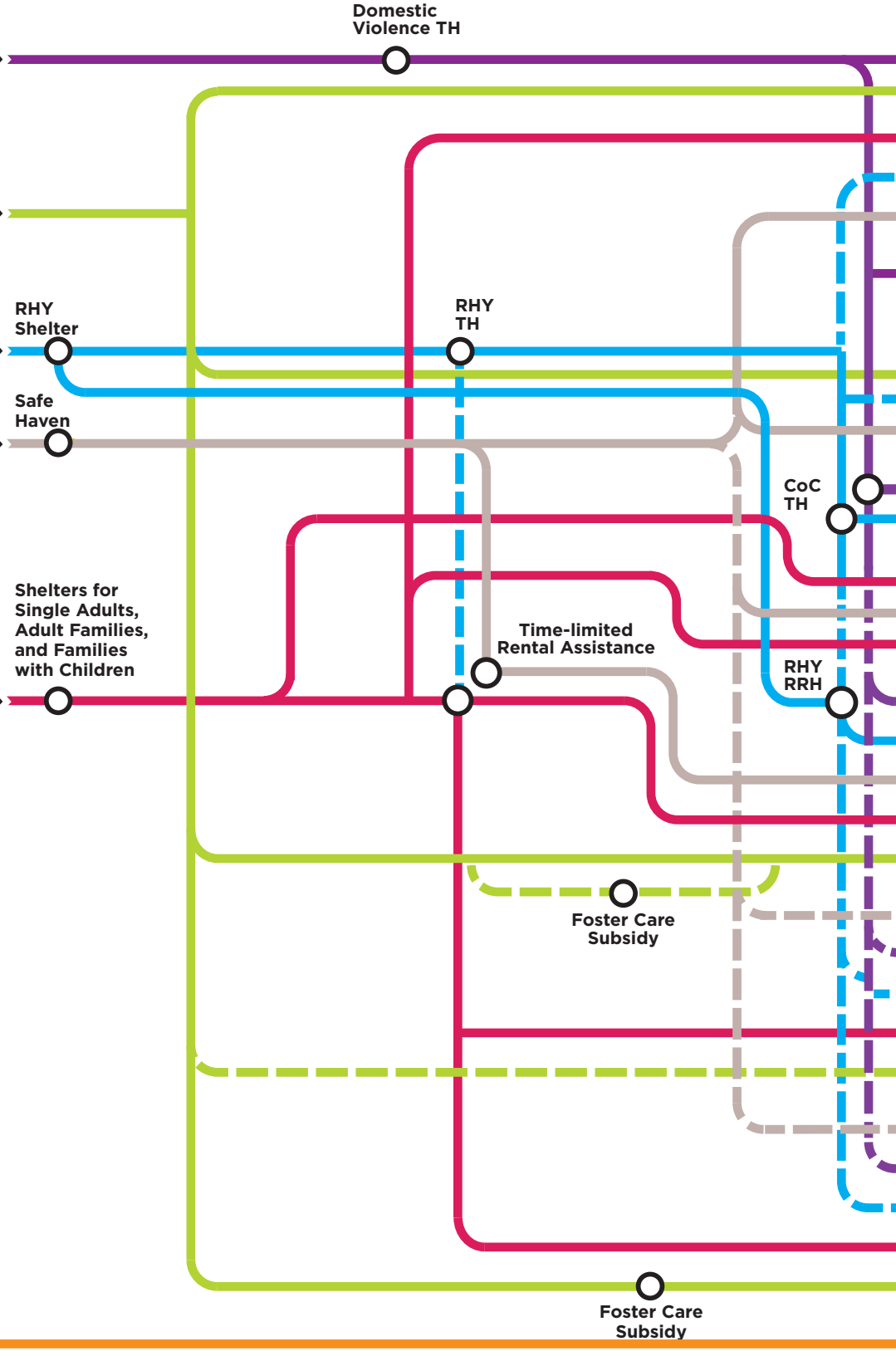
Entry Points

Currently, these entry points often determine the pathway that youth follow, including their options for short-term assistance and permanent housing.

Shelters, Transitional Housing, & Temporary Housing Assistance

Youth may or may not access this short-term assistance as intermediate stops on the way to permanent housing.

Stable Housing

The goal for youth in any pathway is stable housing, along with permanent connections, education/employment, and social-emotional well-being.

Pathways

Existing Aspirational

Runaway & Homeless Youth (RHY)
Single Adults, Adult Families, & Families with Children
Foster Care
Outreach
Domestic Violence

Domestic Violence Shelter
Foster Care
RHY Drop-in
Outreach
Intake Centers for Single Adults, Adult Families, and Families with Children

Coordinated Entry

RHY Shelter
Safe Haven
Shelters for Single Adults, Adult Families, and Families with Children

Domestic Violence TH
RHY TH
Time-limited Rental Assistance
CoC TH
RHY RRH
Foster Care Subsidy

Follow-up Services
Rental Vouchers
Supportive Housing
Unsubsidized Housing (Their own, family and friends apartments)
Affordable Housing
Public Housing

Foster Care Subsidy

Social & Emotional Well-being
Education & Employment
Permanent Housing
Stable Housing

COMMUNITY-BASED SUPPORT SERVICES
YOUTH ACTION BOARD

Prevention

The system:

NYC's primary overall homelessness prevention initiative is its Homebase program. The Homebase program provides New Yorkers facing an immediate housing crisis with counseling to develop a personalized plan to overcome the immediate crisis and achieve stability. It then connects them with assistance with the aim of achieving housing stability, such as emergency rental assistance or legal services for tenants at-risk of losing housing. Relatedly, NYC's Universal Access to Counsel is the nation's first law to provide access to legal services for every low-income tenant facing eviction in Housing Court, which the City has substantially increased funding for since 2015. People can access Homebase counseling and supports by first calling 311 and then visiting a Homebase location.

The City describes its primary youth-specific prevention initiative as its DYCD-funded drop-in centers, which are designed to offer support to unstably housed youth, or to assist with workforce and educational needs, while also serving as an entry point if shelter is required. RHY drop-in centers can function as diversion in some cases, for example, by receiving young people who are not yet homeless but are in conflict with families and providing some degree of youth and family intervention aimed at preventing a situation from escalating. Additionally, the City offers a range of transitional supports to youth who recently left, or are aging out of, foster care to support their stability and well-being.

Challenges youth face:

Lack of a City-wide strategy or system for youth homelessness prevention

"

I don't think we have a prevention system for young adults. I don't even think prevention exists for young adults in the way it exists for the adult system. And I think it would have to be very different than the adult system...
– Adult stakeholder.

Insufficient policies and resources across public systems to identify youth at-risk for homelessness and connect them to timely supports

"

[S]ince a lot of young people who come through our homeless programs were at some point in the foster care and/or juvenile justice system, I think that improving the work there would help tremendously.
– Adult stakeholder.

Family strengthening and stabilization interventions can help prevent many youths' homelessness but often come too late

"

If we're going to utilize a family strengthening model, it can't be when they're 17, 18, 19, and 20 years old. Family strengthening has to start when they're six, seven, and eight. We can't apply family strengthening after it's too late... for a lot of [older youth], much damage has been done.
– Adult stakeholder.

Entry points

The system:

The primary entry points into the youth homelessness system in NYC are drop-in centers, street outreach programs, or—for single adult or family shelters—intake centers. In general, street outreach programs help connect youth on the streets to drop-in centers, which, in turn, connect youth with crisis services programs, shelters, and other services they might need. Youth seeking access to a RHY shelter need to first visit a RHY drop-in center. They can find a RHY drop-in center nearest to them by calling DYCD Youth Connect at 1-800-246-4646 or 311, looking on DYCD's website, or through street outreach or word-of-mouth.

Youth seeking to access a single adult or family shelter need to first visit a designated shelter intake center, depending on the type of adult or family shelter that is appropriate for the youth. They can identify the appropriate intake center by calling 311 or looking on the DHS website. Public schools students can also enter the homelessness system through a referral from DOE's Office Students in Temporary Housing.

Challenges youth face:

Limited awareness of supports and services available

It was hard because I didn't know where to go.
– Youth with lived experience.

Lack of youth-specific coordinated entry

[How youth find out about services] is all over the place... then the young person says I came here for services, and you can't really help me... So, yeah, they get stuck.
– Adult stakeholder.

Inadequate care coordination involving consistent people over time

[T]he counseling didn't help because I already sat and told this person all my information so they can put me in this program and register me, and I'm never gonna' see them again. And then you're showing me another person that you want me to start talking to about my problems.
– Youth with lived experience.

Capacity:

	Number of programs/sites	Daily numbers	Annual numbers	City 2018 allocation
RHY drop-ins (ages < 25)	8 centers*	~297 served**	15,700 served*	>$7,765,000*
RHY street outreach (ages < 25)	4 programs, 16 workers**	~99 contacts**	~17,526 contacts**	>$550,000
Single adult shelter intake centers (ages 18+)	3 centers (1 for men, 2 for women)	n/a	n/a	n/a
Family shelter intake centers (ages 18+)	2 centers (1 for families with children, 1 for families without children)	n/a	n/a	n/a

*City-provided data **Survey of community-based organizations (CBO) (n=21)*
n/a: information not available

Shelters, transitional housing, and temporary housing assistance

The system:

The main forms of shelter and transitional housing available to youth in the city include crisis shelters and transitional independent living facilities (TIL support programs). Crisis services programs (RHY shelters) funded by DYCD offer emergency shelter for runaway and homeless youth up to the age of 24 (recently changed from 21). Single adult and family shelters operated by DHS also provide shelter to young adults age 18 years or older—either through one of the city's three young adult-specific DHS shelters or by young adults staying at non-youth-specific single adult or family shelter. The average length of stay for single adult and family shelters ranged from about 13 to 19 months. Transitional Independent Living (TIL) support programs, funded by DYCD, provide youth experiencing homelessness between the ages of 16 and 24 with support and shelter as they work to establish self-sufficiency.

There is also a comparatively small number of rapid rehousing spaces reserved for youth, but these are not currently funded through City Government resources. In addition to these services, DSS also offers both short- and long-term subsidized housing placements for young adults. NYC does not currently operate a youth-specific host home program, which involves an organized network of caring adults who can provide temporary residence to youth experiencing homelessness.

Challenges youth face

Discomfort with shelters—especially adult shelters—and a lack of other options

I know they got adult shelters out there for like older people, but they're bad; it's like horrible. It's like four or five people in one room, and it's just nasty.
– Youth with lived experience

Variable experiences with staff—sometimes supportive and empowering, sometimes unhelpful and paternalistic

When I got into transitional, [the staff] mimicked everything my parents did. Like, they wanted to become my parents. Because I guess they wanted me to be successful so much, but they weren't listening to me.
– Youth with lived experience

Discontinuation of developmentally-appropriate runaway and homeless youth programs due to artificial age limits

Sometimes they tell you when you're going to be discharged, sometimes you're not, but like, you turn 21 and regardless of you knowing where you're going to go or not, you have to leave, that's traumatic.
– Youth with lived experience

Restrictive rules and curfews, sometimes creating tensions between shelter and work

There's moments where you have to choose between your job and the bed. Because if your schedule does not correspond with the curfew, and the time, it's based on the discretion of the shelter whether or not they're going to give you that bed.
– Youth with lived experience

Inadequate housing navigation and placement support while in shelters and transitional housing

"

Housing specialists actually, is where we're really lacking when it comes to shelters… Actual housing specialists, not people that… go look in the newspaper for an apartment that's available.
– Youth with lived experience.

Inadequate mental health, education, and career development support services

"

I think education and long-term stable housing are so inextricably intertwined… Education leads to better employment; better employment leads to better choices in housing… And that also feeds into the mental health services because if they're not ready to handle a work program, let alone a job, they need that emotional stability. So, it's all intertwined. We need all of it at once."
- Adult stakeholder

Capacity:

	Number of programs/sites	Daily numbers	Annual numbers	City 2018 allocation
Youth shelters (DYCD (ages < 21) and DHS (ages 18+))	12 shelters*	330 youth served*	2,790 youth served*	>$9,400,000*
Single adult shelters (ages 18+)	101	831 youth served*	3,509 youth served*	n/a
Family shelters (ages 18+)	233	3,216 youth served*	7,370 youth served*	n/a
Transitional independent living (TIL) support programs (ages 16-21)	30 programs*	321 youth daily capacity*	837 youth served*	>$19,000,000*
Rapid rehousing	1 program*	115*‡	60 youth served*	$0

*City-provided data **CBO data*
‡ *Daily capacity was recently increased for the RRH program, which explains the higher daily number than annual number served.*
n/a: information not available

Stable housing

The system:

Various formal and informal resources can help young people achieve stability and sustained exits from homelessness. Permanent supportive housing (PSH) is the most common City-funded resource for homeless youth to achieve stable housing in NYC. The NY/NY III initiative, launched in 2005 through a city-state agreement, provides 200 supportive housing units for youth, ages 25 or younger, in NYC transitioning out of foster care (placement agency: ACS). It also provides another 200 units for youth, ages 18-24, leaving psychiatric institutional care (placement agency: NYC DOHMH). In November 2015, Mayor De Blasio announced the NY 15/15 initiative, a commitment to developing 15,000 units of supportive housing over the next 15 years. A portion of these units are intended for young adults who are aging out of foster care (the same subpopulations supported by NY/NY III) with eligibility expanded to include young adults, ages 18-25, who are homeless or at risk of homelessness and young adults who are pregnant or parenting. Eligible young adults may be in ACS, DYCD, or DHS systems and will have coordinated referral through HRA.

Other stable housing resources are not specifically targeted to or designed for youth—such as rental vouchers, public housing, or affordable housing available through nonprofits or the private market. Over 900 young adults had subsidized exits from DSS in 2018 in the form of different time-limited and long-term rental or housing assistance, but these predominantly went to families (parenting youth). NYC Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) offers Section 8 vouchers through referrals from DHS or HRA providers. NYCHA accepts applications for public housing, but it prioritizes families with children, and it is unknown how many units are provided to youth. There are also some Section 8 and NYCHA priorities for foster care youth. HRA currently offers follow-up services through Homebase, and some individual organizations have established follow-up programs or services funded through other sources.

Challenges youth face:

Insufficient affordable housing

There's not enough permanent housing for [youth]. Independent housing in New York is incredibly expensive. So then a lot of our youth are trying to get supportive housing, other low-cost options, and there are not enough beds. So even if there is enough transitional housing for all of these youth, we still have not fixed the permanent housing conundrum.
– Adult stakeholder

Often having to go through adult systems to access mainstream resources

Currently, in New York City, you cannot access... affordable housing vouchers through a youth shelter. You have to do it through a DHS shelter... [T]here's a lot of advocacy work that I've been personally involved in to change that, to have... youth shelters be able to access those vouchers. Because currently that's not an option for us.
– Youth with lived experience

Inadequate aftercare supports after exiting shelters or housing programs

What our aftercare person does is they do home visits, monthly home visits to the client. They reconnect them to services. They find out whether they kept this job or that job. They help them to make sure that they build that bridge between them and the landlord, and then we also connect with the landlord... There has to be an aftercare person that follows these young people once they leave shelter. There has to be.
– Adult stakeholder

Capacity:

	Number of programs/sites	Daily numbers	Annual numbers	City 2018 allocation
Supportive housing (for youth)	6 programs (3 congregate, 3 scattered site)*	400 units dedicated to young adults through NY/NYIII; 1,236 units to be dedicated to young adults, and 451 to young adult families, through NYC15/15*		>$2,725,000*
Rental vouchers now	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
DSS rental/ housing assistance (not youth-specific)	29 programs	n/a	914 youth served (511 time-limited and 403 long-term assistance; 710 of these were youth-headed families with children)*	n/a
Public housing	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Affordable housing	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

*City-provided data **CBO data

n/a: information not available

Glossary

Relevant City agencies and offices

ACS – The Administration for Children's Services (ACS) provides child welfare services to children and their families. ACS funds services for youth in foster care and transitional services for youth recently exited from foster care.

CIDI - The Center for Innovation through Data Intelligence (CIDI) is a research/policy center that reports directly to the Deputy Mayor for Health and Human Services. CIDI conducts citywide interagency research to identify areas of service need in the City.

DHS – The Department of Homeless Services (DHS) provides temporary, emergency shelter to all New Yorkers in need and aims to help individuals and families transition into permanent housing and self-sufficiency. DHS administers the Homebase prevention services, single adult and family shelters, among other services.

DOE – The Department of Education (DOE) manages the city's public school system, the largest in the country. DOE delivers services and supports, as required by the Federal McKinney-Vento Act, to support the education of students experiencing homelessness.

DOHMH – The Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) is responsible for public health. Among other services, DOHMHM provides supportive housing for individuals and families that are chronically homeless and have a mental illness and/or a substance use disorder.

DSS – The Department of Social Services (DSS) is comprised of the administrative units of the NYC Human Resources Administration (HRA) and the Department of Homeless Services (DHS). Through HRA and DHS, DSS is in charge of the majority of the city's social services programs.

DYCD – The Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) supports youth and their families through a range of youth and community development programs, and administers city, state and federal funds to community-based organizations. DYCD funds runaway and homeless youth (RHY) programs.

HRA – The Human Resources Administration (HRA) is dedicated to fighting poverty and income inequality and is the largest local social services agency in the country. HRA provides food assistance, temporary cash assistance, anti-eviction legal services, rental assistance (through the City's Homebase prevention program), career services, domestic violence services, and services for people with HIV/AIDS, among others.

HPD - The Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) is responsible for developing and maintaining the city's stock of affordable housing.

NYCHA – The NYC Housing Authority (NYCHA) provides public housing for low- and moderate-income residents. NYCHA also administers a citywide Section 8 Leased Housing Program in rental apartments.

OHAHS - The Office of Supportive and Affordable Housing and Services (OSAHS) is a division of HRA that is focused on developing permanent housing solutions for formerly homeless individuals and families. OSAHS is the coordinating entity for the Mayor's New York City 15/15 (NY 15/15) Supportive Housing initiative, working closely with DOHMH and HPD.

System components

Coordinated entry – Coordinated entry is a process developed to ensure that all people experiencing a housing crisis have fair and equal access and are quickly identified, assessed for, referred, and connected to housing and assistance based on their strengths and needs. Increasingly, communities are developing youth-specific coordinated entry and assessment tools and systems. NYC currently lacks a youth-specific coordinated entry system; the City's coordinated entry system for adults and families is called the Coordinated Assessment and Placement System (CAPS).

Follow-up services - No federal definition exists to outline "aftercare" or "follow-up" services programs, but

communities typically design them to support youth who have been diverted from the homeless system or are exiting from other housing programs. These services often consist of "light touch" case management and referrals to mainstream services. The goal is successful integration into the community with social supports and connections to appropriate services of the youth's choice.

Diversion – Diversion is a developing program model that communities typically implement with the goal of resolving immediate housing crises that can lead to homelessness. These programs work to prevent youth at risk of becoming homeless (particularly those imminently at risk of homelessness) from entering the homeless system. They often include "light-touch" services (e.g., mediation with family members or landlords, legal representation for households facing eviction, or small amounts of financial assistance) to help address a crisis or find workable solutions to prevent a crisis. The definitional lines between "prevention" and "diversion" can be blurry, but diversion is generally focused on later-stage prevention or early intervention after a crisis has occurred or has become imminent in the near future. Prevention can include more upstream strategies to identify those at-risk for homelessness and intervene well before a crisis emerges.

Prevention – Prevention involves a range of policies and programs aimed at identifying youth and children at-risk for homelessness and delivering supports and services before they experience homelessness. Some prevention interventions can take place upstream—for example, by addressing underlying root causes of homelessness, such as family instability, racial inequity, poverty, unaffordable housing markets, child abuse and neglect, and problematic family dynamics for LGBTQ youth. Others may take place later in young people's trajectories into vulnerability—such as screening for housing instability, or risk of housing instability, among youth in behavioral health, child welfare, justice, or school systems and aligning appropriate transitional supports and services to prevent homelessness, or providing emergency cash or rental assistance to young people who are likely to lose housing.

Youth Action Board (YAB) – The Youth Action Board (YAB) is comprised of youth with lived experience of homelessness and is represented on the board of the Continuum of Care (CoC) and consulted on CoC plans to prevent and end youth homelessness. The YAB is also represented on the City's Youth Homelessness Taskforce.

Entry points

Drop-in centers – RHY drop-in centers are located in each of the five boroughs of NYC. The drop-in centers provide youth up to the age of 24 and their families with essentials like food, clothing and immediate shelter as well as access to counseling, support, and referrals to relevant services. DHS also operates adult and family drop-in centers.

Intake centers – People experiencing homelessness in NYC can seek assistance at a designated intake center, which are open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. An intake center visit is required prior to going into a shelter. There are specific intake centers for different populations, including single adults, families with children, and families without children. The adult and family coordinated entry system in the city operates through these intake centers. Individuals or families are transported from the intake center to an appropriate and available shelter in the city. Families with children and adult families are provided conditional shelter as their eligibility determination is made; there is no eligibility process for single adults.

Street outreach – Youth street outreach programs disseminate information about RHY services, provide food, clothing and other resources; make referrals to other service providers; and transport youth back to their homes or relatives, to crisis shelters, or to other safe locations. Street outreach teams develop rapport with youth in the streets and elsewhere, directly informing runaway and homeless youth and youth at risk for homelessness about the available services. When necessary, these street outreach workers refer youth who need services to the drop-in centers and other RHY programs. The City also administers a broader outreach program, HOME-STAT, for the overall homeless population, which, in 2016, increased and enhanced the capacity of prior outreach services.

Shelters, transitional housing, and temporary housing assistance

Family shelters – DHS operates shelter services for

families with and without children (under age 21). Once clients enter shelter, they have certain responsibilities that they must meet, including obtaining and maintaining employment for all those who are able to work. With the assistance of their caseworkers, households develop an Independent Living Plan (ILP), a document that outlines relevant goals to exit shelter and return to self-sufficiency. Families can remain in shelter for an extended period.

Host homes - Host Homes are an emerging national model of housing for youth experiencing homelessness. Models vary across communities, as no federal funding source defines the host home model. Youth live in the home of a volunteer family or individual with the goal of moving out into permanent housing at some point. Host families can be volunteers from the community or friends or relatives of the youth experiencing homelessness. Host Home programs include case management, conflict resolution, and family engagement, when appropriate.

Rapid Rehousing (RRH) – RRH targets youth experiencing homelessness who cannot return quickly to a family-living situation and do not have other near-term housing options to pursue. The goal is to provide immediate access to stable, independent housing, along with supportive services, to help youth establish permanency and develop independent living skills. The core components of RRH include housing identification assistance (directly or through a partner organization), rent and move-in assistance, individualized case management, and wrap-around services (either directly or through a partner organization).

RHY shelters – Crisis Services Programs, funded by DYCD, offer emergency shelter for runaway and homeless youth under age 21. These voluntary, short-term residential programs provide emergency shelter and crisis intervention services aimed at reuniting youth with their families or, if family reunification is not possible, arranging appropriate transitional and long-term placements.

Single adult shelters - DHS operates the most comprehensive shelter services system for single adults in the country, with programs to assist individuals in overcoming homelessness and securing permanent housing. Once clients enter shelter, they have certain responsibilities that they must meet, including obtaining and maintaining employment for all those who are able to work.

**Transitional independent living (TIL) support programs – ** Transitional Independent Living (TIL) support programs are NYC's youth-specific (DYCD-funded) transitional housing (TH) program. TIL support programs provide youth between the ages of 16 and 21 with support and shelter as they work to establish self-sufficiency. Youth may stay in the TIL facilities for up to 18 months (or longer if youth are not yet 18 years old when the 18-month limit is reached). TIL services include educational programs, vocational training, job placement assistance, and counseling, among other supports.

Stable housing

Affordable housing – Affordable housing is not exclusively a homeless program model, but is envisioned as an option for formerly homeless youth who need ongoing housing subsidies or lower-cost housing to remain permanently housed. Affordable housing is generally funded through mainstream programs like local housing authorities. Options include housing subsidies or vouchers that enable young adults (who have reached the minimum age allowed to occupy rental housing) to secure below market-rate housing or rent based on income of individuals living in the household.

Public housing - Public housing property is owned by a government authority. The rental prices of units are priced much below the market rate, allowing eligible very low- and low-income families, the elderly, and people with disabilities to access affordable housing.

Rental vouchers – The Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) Program provides rental assistance and home ownership options to extremely low, very low- and low-income households. The voucher program aims to enable eligible households to rent or purchase decent, safe and sanitary housing in the private housing market. After a voucher is issued, it remains with the family or individual as long as they remain eligible, even if they change residence. The dollar amount of HCV payments will vary depending on the income of the family or individual and the approved rent/mortgage for the unit.

Supportive housing – Supportive housing, also called "permanent supportive housing" is affordable housing with on-site services that aim to help formerly homeless,

disabled tenants live with dignity in the community. Supportive housing is permanent and affordable – all tenants hold leases and pay about a third of their income in rent. The residences are owned and operated by nonprofit organizations and are accountable to their city, state, and federal funders.

Unsubsidized housing – This simply refers to housing available on the private market.

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