CHAPIN HALL

A Youth Homelessness System Assessment for New York City

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A Youth Homelessness System Assessment for New York City
Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago
This report was submitted to the New York City
Mayor's Office for Economic Opportunity.

Contents

NYC Office of the Deputy Mayor for Health and Human Services Response Letter

Today in our city, there are roughly 4,500 youth and young adults experiencing homelessness. These youth and young adults are parents to nearly 2,800 children who are in their care. Homelessness is an experience no person should have to endure, but research shows that there are significant additional barriers that homeless youth and young adults face. Building on the administration's ongoing investments to combat youth homelessness, on June of 2018, Mayor Bill de Blasio announced a taskforce to prevent and end youth homelessness in New York City. This group, representing the City, nonprofit providers, advocates and youth with lived experience, coordinated a six-month community planning process to inform the City's next steps for preventing and ending youth homelessness.

As part of these efforts, the Mayor's Office for Economic Opportunity, in partnership with the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Health and Human Services and the Center for Innovation through Data Intelligence, commissioned a Youth Homelessness System Assessment, funded by the NYC Coalition on the Continuum of Care's federal planning grant. This assessment was conducted by Chapin Hall, an independent policy research center at the University of Chicago, and provides the City's strategic planning process with a data-informed roadmap of the system's strengths, as well as the areas in which there remain some gaps.

Key takeaways from this report include:
- The City has invested significantly to be able to provide a crisis response system for young people when they become homeless, including the expansion of Runaway and Homeless Youth beds, as well as 24-hour drop-in centers.
- There is room to improve prevention efforts – identifying youth and children at-risk for homelessness and delivering supports and services – so that young people do not become homeless in the first place.
- More long-term housing options are needed for youth in the high-cost rental market of New York City.

For those of us who have never experienced homelessness, it can be easy to underestimate the challenges and service barriers that drive housing instability. It is therefore crucial that the City embed youth and young adults who have experienced homelessness into the policy making process. This assessment represents an important step in that direction, because Chapin Hall collaborated with youth in their data collection processes and the findings are rooted in youth perspective. The City of New York is committed to furthering our efforts to prevent and end youth homelessness in our city. We believe NYC can be a place where homelessness, as the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness states, is "rare, brief and nonrecurring" for youth and young adults.

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NYC Office of the Mayor
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NYC Coalition on the Continuum of Care Youth Action Board Response Letter

National estimates by Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago show that as many as 1 in 30 adolescents, ages 13 to 17, and 1 in 10 young adults, ages 18 to 25, experience some form of homelessness in a year. Further, 20 to 40 percent of young people across the nation that experience homelessness are LGBTQIA+ identified, and a vast majority are youth of color. NYC has the largest overall homeless population across the nation, and, on any given night, there are 4,500 unaccompanied and parenting youth, under the age of 25, counted as experiencing homelessness. However, homelessness manifests in various ways, and many young people continue to fall through the cracks, uncounted and unseen, because of different definitions of homelessness and approaches used to count and identify youth.

The NYC Coalition on the Continuum of Care Youth Action Board (YAB) applauds the City for increased attention to youth homelessness and much needed additional supports. Furthermore, we would be excited to see some of the recommendations set forth in the Youth Homelessness System Assessment come to fruition.

A few findings that especially speak to the YAB are the following:
- *Youth described young people's chances of obtaining permanent housing resources like "winning the lottery,"* highlighting the need for more long-term housing options available to youth for true stability.
- *Prevention involves a range of policies and programs aimed at identifying youth and children at-risk of homelessness,* which the YAB strongly believes NYC works hard to maintain, and the YAB also agrees that these policies and programs should be more youth-centered and informed.
- *Drop-in centers, street outreach programs, and intake centers play a crucial role in a young person's access to services*, and the YAB underscores the recommendation that developing youth-specific coordinated entry will help ensure all people experiencing a housing crisis have fair and equal access to resources.
- *With youth in foster care, there is a more guaranteed continuum and system of supports through young adulthood.* The City should explore this example in its efforts to create a coherent youth homelessness system.

The YAB has been working with the City through the Youth Homelessness Taskforce and played an integral role in this System Assessment. The System Assessment included consultations with the YAB at multiple stages, including study design, describing the current system, and identifying implications of the findings. Further, one YAB member was hired as part of the research team. The YAB continues to work with the City to improve the ways the needs of young people who are currently homelessness are met. We also feel it is equally important to ensure that youth at high risk of becoming homeless get the support that they need and deserve to prevent them from becoming homeless at all. Most, if not all, YAB members feel that their initial experience of homelessness was traumatic and preventable. Thus, NYC needs to expand approaches to prevent youth from experiencing homelessness while maintaining commitment to giving currently homeless youth a way out.

YAB members, advocates, philanthropists, and on-the-ground social workers maintain that NYC will save major dollars if young people experiencing homelessness are housed and supported with a host of cost-effective support services that will enable them to make smooth transitions into stability. With all the great efforts the City has made, true success in the eyes of the marginalized is stable housing to strengthen young people's platform for growth and digging deeper into the root causes of youth homelessness to protect the ones that are at risk of such adversities.

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Abstract

This report presents findings from the first youth home-lessness system assessment commissioned by New York City. This was a rapid, mixed-methods assessment that took place from October through December 2018. The assessment revealed that youth homelessness is gaining attention from City Government. This includes addition-al resources to address the issue—especially for drop-in centers, crisis services and shelters, and transitional and supportive housing programs. There has also been an increase in broader City investments to address home-lessness overall in recent years—ranging from outreach, to eviction prevention, to supportive housing units and low-income housing assistance—some of which has benefited youth.

Yet the assessment also found critical gaps in youth-spe-cific resources in the following areas:
- prevention and early intervention supports,
- long-term and affordable housing options,
- mental health services,
- education and career development supports, and
- aftercare services and supports that extend beyond program exits.

Crosscutting system capacity issues also emerged. These involve underlying challenges that apply to multiple parts of the system, from prevention, to crisis response, to stable housing. Significant bottlenecks included the lack of institutional ownership and accountability for a coordinated response, fragmented programming, lack of a coordinated entry and assessment system for youth, difficult experiences described by many youth with staff interactions and navigating a complex system, and a lack of common and longitudinal outcomes measurement.

The assessment reveals opportunities to further improve the youth homelessness system, each of which may require targeted formative studies before implementation. These include developing a system-level theory of change centered on youth voice and outcomes and racial and LGBTQ equity, and designating institutional ownership and accountability for coordinating action and tracking results. They further involve developing, testing, and expanding interventions for youth in the areas of prevention, early intervention, and long-term housing stability, and strengthening incentives and mechanisms for coordinated care across organizations and agencies.

PHOTO: NYC Youth Action Board members. Lucien Samaha, courtesy of Point Source Youth.

Executive summary

This report presents findings from the first youth homelessness system assessment commissioned by New York City (NYC). This was a rapid, mixed-methods assessment that took place from October through December 2018. It sought to provide new insights into the full range of housing programs and services available to youth experiencing homelessness, the system capacity to deliver services effectively, gaps in capacity, and young people's experiences with the system.

This work addresses an urgent and complex challenge. On a single night in 2018, more than 4,500 unaccompanied and parenting youth were counted as experiencing homelessness. NYC has the largest homeless population overall, compared to other cities across the nation, and the third highest number of unaccompanied youth. These numbers don't even include the young people experiencing homelessness in more hidden ways that make them harder to count or who experience homelessness at different times during the year. Still, they represent thousands of young people every day who experience trauma and lack the stability and support they need to thrive during a key developmental period. Additionally, data consistently show that youth of color; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) youth; and pregnant and parenting youth face homelessness at disproportionately high rates in NYC and across the country. This context makes clear that fragmented programs and initiatives are not enough. The City needs a coordinated system-level response centered on equity to end youth homelessness.

The assessment advances a public health perspective for assessing and strengthening the City's youth home-lessness system, including a strong emphasis on pre-vention and on using data to define the problem and to identify, evaluate, and monitor solutions. The as-sessment involved interviews and focus groups with 53 youth with lived experience of homelessness and 45 adult stakeholders with various roles in the system, along with a survey of community-based organizations and data gathering from multiple City agencies.

I can't really put into words how much it means to me to be in stable housing. Because I mean, I just can't; I just can't explain the gratitude and how grateful I am to have my own place. And that I'm not on the streets.
– A youth who experienced homelessness in NYC

The assessment revealed that youth homelessness is emerging as a priority issue for City Government. The City has contributed increasing resources to address the issue—especially for drop-in centers, shelters, and transitional and supportive housing programs. Over the past five years, the City has grown its drop-in centers from seven to eight with five now operating 24/7. This has strengthened the accessibility of young people's entry points into the system. With an overall increase of supportive housing investments for formerly homeless individuals and families with high service needs, the City has taken efforts to increase young people's access to these resources and to ensure that a proportion of new units is reserved for youth.

There are important areas of progress in the areas of prevention and early intervention. These include improved resources and supports for youth transitioning out of foster care and more community coordinators and other personnel working with students experiencing, or at-risk for, homelessness in schools. Although Homebase—the City's initiative for homelessness prevention—is not specific to youth, it provides important resources overall for New Yorkers facing a housing crisis, and this program has been significantly enhanced in recent years. Furthermore, the City has significantly expanded housing assistance for addressing family homelessness. Given the important intersections between family and youth homelessness— both because family homelessness and housing instability are a common precursor to youth homelessness, and because many youth experiencing homelessness are parenting themselves—these investments likely help address youth homelessness indirectly.

More broadly, the City has recently increased emphasis

on a coordinated response to preventing and ending youth homelessness. The hiring of a Senior Consultant in the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Health and Human Services to coordinate efforts on this topic and the establishment of a Youth Action Board and Youth Homelessness Taskforce—while potentially temporary measures—reinforce this emphasis.

Yet the assessment also reveals critical opportunities to strengthen the system, both with respect to the continuum of services available for addressing youth homelessness and to the capacity to deliver services that achieve results as a system. In terms of services and supports, the assessment illuminated significant gaps in long-term and affordable housing options for vulnerable youth in the city, prevention and early intervention, mental health services, supports for education and career development, and aftercare services that extend assistance to young people after they exit shelter and housing programs. The assessment identified a need for developmentally appropriate services and supports for older young adults (ages 21 or older) across the continuum. Further, several adult stakeholders felt that, while investments overall had generally increased in recent years, funding remained insufficient to meet the need.

In the course of this work, we found crosscutting system capacity issues. Key issues included the lack of ownership and accountability for a coordinated response by any particular City agency or office, fragmented programming without incentives or infrastructure for coordinated entry and service delivery for youth in crisis, and absence of common and longitudinal outcomes measurement. Further, youth commonly cited a lack of consistent information or guidance on navigating the system and achieving long-term housing stability. Overall, the assessment surfaced the lack of a formalized system of coordinated care for youth experiencing homelessness in NYC, which several stakeholders contrasted to a more unified system of support available to youth transitioning out of foster care.

Based on the system capacity needs, we recommend the following steps for the City to explore. Each may require targeted research prior to implementation:

Prevention

- Examine opportunities to adapt Homebase outreach, access, and programming to further meet the unique prevention and diversion needs of youth, and collect and track data on how well Homebase services engage youth and address their needs.
- Integrate screening and early identification processes for identifying youth at-risk for homelessness in key public systems, such as behavioral health systems, child welfare, justice systems, and education systems, along with processes for coordinating timely supports and services.

Entry points

- Develop systems, processes, and common screening and assessment tools for youth-specific coordinated entry and ongoing coordination of care. Leverage technology and youth insights.
- Consider devising a public awareness campaign, co-designed with youth with lived experience, to mitigate stigma associated with youth homelessness and direct youth who need help to common entry points to access information and services.

Shelters, transitional housing, and temporary housing assistance

- Strengthen and evaluate youth housing program models that incorporate wraparound services, such as mental and physical health, education, and career support. Ensure existing residential programs have adequate resources and technical support to deliver or coordinate these services effectively.
- Develop a strategy for coordination, knowledge sharing, and smooth transitions between youth and family homelessness services in the city.
- Pilot and evaluate flexible, quickly deployable non-residential intervention options to complement the current set of shelters and residential programs in the city. Such intervention options might be particularly useful for youth who are more newly homeless and present less need or desire for intensive services through residential programs. Examples could include interagency case management, peer counseling, cash transfers, youth-specific rapid rehousing, and programs facilitating natural supports in the community, or combinations of these approaches.

- Make housing specialists who are sensitive to the unique situations of youth available to youth in shelters and transitional housing.

Stable housing

- Develop and evaluate follow-up (or "aftercare") service models for youth following exits from shelters or housing programs.
- Conduct a stocktaking of permanent and affordable housing resources available to youth—through public funding and the private market—and identify opportunities to increase the availability and accessibility of affordable housing for youth.
- Conduct a youth labor market assessment,[1] and identify opportunities to increase skills-to-labor-market matches and career development opportunities for youth experiencing, or at-risk for, homelessness.

Crosscutting issues

- Identify which City agency/office is responsible for coordinating a collaborative, interagency system response to youth homelessness, and ensure that it has the authority, support, and resources it needs to do so effectively.
- Extend and strengthen currently temporary mechanisms that support a coordinated response to youth homelessness, including a senior-level City official spearheading the coordination, a Youth Action Board, and a Youth Homelessness Taskforce or other collaborative body with diverse perspectives.
- Drawing on lived experience and data, develop a system-level theory of change for preventing and ending youth homelessness that centers youth outcomes, lived experience, and equity.[2] Use this to help develop a strategy for filling key gaps in the inventory of programs and services and a plan for analyzing and monitoring progress at the system level.
- Routinely assess and address equity in access to housing and wraparound supports and system outcomes based on race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and gender identity.
- Plan for enhancing and replicating this type of system assessment over time to track the evolution of the system, and periodically revisit opportunities for strengthening it.

Overall, the assessment revealed a growing commitment to ending youth homelessness among local providers and stakeholders. At the same time, the scale of the challenge continues to outsize the City's response. There remain many opportunities for the City to strengthen its work to prevent and end young New Yorkers' experiences of homelessness and related adversity so they can thrive and contribute to NYC's shared prosperity.

[1.] A youth labor market assessment examines the labor supply (labor market activity, occupational preferences, education and skills possessed), demand (employment opportunities, growth sectors, education and skills required, etc.), and conditions of work (quality, safety, hours, and earnings) in a given economy and examines and disaggregates data and trends specifically for youth (ILO, 2013). This kind of analysis allows for tailored and targeted economic policies and programs to promote gainful employment and economic opportunity among youth, particularly more marginalized populations.

[2.] Similarly, a broader homelessness system assessment conducted by Future Laboratories for Seattle/King County identified the lack of a system-level theory of change as a critical gap to the system's functioning and provided guidance for addressing this gap. The online report can be accessed at: https://hrs.kc.future.com/actions.

Quick facts

- On a single night, 4,584 youth under the age of 25 were counted as sleeping in shelters or on the streets in NYC: 2,142 were unaccompanied and 2,422 were parenting youth (HUD, 2018).
- Parenting youth counted as homeless on a single night were accompanied by 2,810 children (HUD, 2018)
- Youth experiencing homelessness and housing instability in NYC are overwhelmingly youth of color (95%); gay, lesbian, bisexual, or queer/questioning (42%); and transgender/gender non-binary (8%) (NYC CIDI, 2018a).
- From 2005 to 2017, rising rents led to the disappearance of over 425,000 apartments renting for $900 or less (in 2017 dollars) in NYC's housing inventory. Apartments renting for over $2,700 per month more than doubled (NYC Office of the Comptroller, 2018). In 2017, the vacancy rate for units renting for $800 or less was about 1% (NYC HPD, 2018)
- At entry points to the system, drop-in centers, and street outreach reported 396 daily touchpoints with youth;[3] three-quarters of these are served through drop-in centers (Survey of Community-based Organizations, 2018).
- Approximately 4,714 youth are served daily through the City's short-term housing and shelter programs. Of these, on a given day, only about 667 (14%) are served through youth or young adult-specific shelter or housing programs, but these rates are higher for younger youth (CIDI, personal communication, 2018; Survey of Community-based Organizations, 2018).
- There are currently 400 units of stable housing reserved for youth through the City's NY/NYIII permanent supportive housing initiative—and additional youth-designated units are coming online through NY 15/15—and some youth may access units that are not specifically designated for youth.
- In 2018, 914 youth received DSS subsidized housing placements; although 8 out of 10 of these subsidized placements went to parenting youth. Additionally, there is a small number of non-City-funded rapid rehousing spaces for youth (about 115 currently) (CIDI, personal communication, 2018; Survey of Community-based Organizations, 2018).
- Only 29% of organizations providing services to youth experiencing homelessness have formal structures for youth voice and leadership (Survey of Community-based Organizations, 2018).

[3.] This estimate cannot be interpreted as a number-of-youth-served because organizations did not provide de-duplicated numbers for youth that had multiple service contacts.

Introduction

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Motivation and objectives

On a single night in 2018, more than 4,500 unaccompanied and parenting youth, under age 25, were counted as experiencing homelessness (HUD, 2018). According to 2018 data reported by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), NYC had the largest homeless population overall compared to other cities across the nation and the third highest number of unaccompanied youth on a specific night (Henry, Mahathey, Morrill, Robinson, Shivji, & Watt, 2018). This represents thousands of young people every day who experience trauma and lack the stability and support they need to thrive.

Adolescence and early adulthood are particularly sensitive periods to experience homelessness and its accompanying adversities. These periods constitute a critical window for brain development when young people need opportunities to cultivate their aspirations, skills, and identities in supported and stable situations (The Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, 2011). Experiencing homelessness during these years not only disrupts young people's positive trajectories into adulthood, but it is also a foremost pathway into adult homelessness, underscoring the importance of tackling youth homelessness to realize an end to homelessness overall (Chamberlain & Johnson, 2013).

To address this challenge, NYC is taking steps toward a coordinated, system-level response to ending youth homelessness. The focus on youth-specific solutions to youth homelessness is essential because such solutions acknowledge and address the reasons that young people experience unaccompanied homelessness during these formative years. A substantial body of literature shows that the primary reasons youth become homelessness are related to family conflict and instability, destabilizing involvement in the child welfare or juvenile justice systems, and lack of family or community acceptance, among other reasons (O'Grady & Gaetz, 2009). When young people become homeless, they face greater exposure to risks such as violence, trafficking, transactional sex, and self-medication of trauma with illicit drugs, which can all increase the likelihood of health problems and impair young people's opportunities for future success (McKenzie-Mohr, Coates, & McLeod, 2012). As such, concerted, system-level solutions are needed to prevent and address youth homelessness early, to provide developmentally appropriate supports, and to promote young people's resilience.

Furthermore, youth may be more likely to benefit from mainstream resources—such as shelters, affordable housing programs, or mental health services available to the general homeless population—when youth experiences and preferences are taken into account in the design and delivery of these services. Previous research shows that youth experiencing homelessness apply complex logics to choices about whether and when to engage services (Samuels, Cerven, Curry, & Robinson, 2018). Reasons youth report rejecting formal resources include strict rules, distrust of adults, and lack of physical or emotional safety in shelter facilities (DeRosa et al., 1999; Pedersen, Tucker, and Kovalchik, 2016). Further, young people consider their complex identities—e.g., related to sexual orientation, gender, race, ethnicity, and age—when weighing the risks and benefits of engaging a particular program based on a program's reputation (Samuels et al., 2018).

These issues underscore why a youth homelessness system needs to be centered on, and responsive to, the needs, preferences, disproportionalities, and voices of youth with lived experience. For example, if young people have to go through adult shelters to access a housing resource, they might be reluctant to subject themselves to the discomfort or sense of insecurity of doing so. If information about housing or services is not widely available through *youth* services, systems, or communication channels, youth experiencing homelessness will be at an informational disadvantage. Some young people may be more comfortable participating in an assessment with, or receiving guidance from, a peer than an older adult. These types of considerations can con-

tribute to a more youth-responsive system, including for leveraging resources that are not youth-specific.

NYC's steps toward a more strategic and comprehensive approach to ending youth homelessness have involved a range of public and private partners. In March 2018, with philanthropic funding from Deutsche Bank Americas Foundation, a Senior Consultant for Youth Homelessness was hired through the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Health and Human Services to spearhead coordination of the City's response to youth homelessness. In June 2018, the City launched a Youth Homelessness Taskforce. In September 2018, the Mayor's Office for Economic Opportunity contracted with Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago to conduct the first youth homelessness system assessment commissioned by the City. This report summarizes the findings of this rapid assessment.

The assessment aims to provide NYC agencies and stakeholders with insights into:
- the range of programs and services available to youth experiencing homelessness,
- the system capacity to deliver services effectively,
- where progress has been made and critical service gaps remain, and
- young people's experiences with the system and services.

This assessment applies a comprehensive system per-spective to the challenge of youth homelessness in NYC. This is largely informed by a public health approach.

One of the core tenants of a public health approach is to first define the problem (Mercey, Rosenberg, Powell, Broome, & Roper, 1993). Another key aspect of a public health approach is a strong focus on prevention rather than disproportionately concentrating on reactive policies and programs. As such, we briefly summarize what is known about the problem of youth homelessness, and we present mixed-methods research findings on the system's capacity to prevent and address it. Historically, homelessness policies and systems have focused primarily on crisis response. While crisis response is important and a significant focus of this system assessment, we also take prevention on the front end, and stability on the back end, as critical components of any system that aims to end youth homelessness. Figure 1 shows a comprehensive system perspective to ending youth homelessness.

Further, this approach is consistent with the U.S. In-teragency Council on Homelessness (USICH) *Criteria and Benchmarks for Achieving the Goal of Ending Youth Homelessness* (USICH, 2018). These call for a coordinat-ed community response designed to ensure that youth homelessness is "rare, brief, and non-recurring." To this end, USICH advises communities to:
- *Make the incidence of homelessness rare*. Use pre-vention and diversion strategies wherever possible;

Figure 1. 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.

- *Make homelessness brief*. Build coordinated entry processes to effectively link all youth experiencing homelessness to "choice-driven" crisis housing and service solutions tailored to their needs and to act with urgency to "swiftly assist youth to move into permanent or non-time-limited housing options with appropriate services and supports"; and
- *Make homelessness non-recurring*. Have resources, plans, and system capacity in place to continue to prevent and quickly end future experiences of homelessness.

Following this **introduction** section, the report begins with a section that briefly describes the assessment's **method**, including the data sources and perspectives captured. The **findings** section then presents qualitative and quantitative findings on each main segment of the youth homelessness system, with a subsection devoted to each segment: *prevention*; *entry points*; *shelters, transitional housing, and temporary housing assistance;* and *stable housing*. Some of our findings are related to system capacity strengths or limitations that apply to several or all segments of the system, and we present these in a following subsection on *crosscutting issues*. The report ends with a **discussion** section, including directions for data and research and for strengthening the system. The report also includes statistical tables in the **appendices** that provide descriptive summaries of the system capacity based on the data received or collected from City agencies and community-based organizations.

This report is complemented by *New York City Youth Homelessness System Map & Capacity Overview*, a brief document that includes an updated visual of the overall system, as well as brief profiles with additional information on each segment of the system.

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Defining the problem

This section summarizes prior and available evidence on the scale and characteristics of youth homelessness in NYC. It is important to use evidence to define the problem that the system assessed in this report aims to address. As such, we synthesized available information from City Government partners and published reports on the scale and characteristics of youth homelessness in NYC.

Notably, different federal policies and programs define youth homelessness in varying ways, not to mention variations at state and local levels. For example, some definitions include young people who couch-surf or double-up because they lack a safe and stable place to stay; others focus more narrowly on people living in places not meant for human habitation (e.g., on the streets) or in homeless shelters. This assessment looks at the whole of the system capacity for youth experiencing any form of homelessness. However, we are explicit about the forms of homelessness included in statistics related to the scope of the problem and eligibility criteria for services.

How many youth experience homelessness in NYC? Everywhere in the country, including NYC, this is a tougher question to answer than it might seem. Several factors contribute to this challenge, such as:
- different views on what constitutes homelessness;
- different time periods that can be used to capture prevalence (e.g., a single night, month, school year, or calendar year);
- defining youth according to different age parameters;
- measurement difficulties (especially with many youth not wanting to disclose homelessness status due to concerns about stigma or distrust of public authorities); and
- sampling difficulties (challenges with identifying youth experiencing homelessness given the common transience and hidden nature of their situations, and the fact that many youth experiencing homelessness can be difficult to distinguish from stably housed youth).

With these complexities in mind, below we summarize available estimates on the scale of youth homelessness in NYC based on different periods, definitions, and sampling strategies:
- On a single night in 2018, 2,142 unaccompanied youth (under age 25), and 2,422 parenting youth, were counted as sleeping in shelters or on the streets in NYC (HUD, 2018). These numbers were based on the City's point-in-time (PIT) count, which involved counting people that were in shelters and surveying people found on the streets.
- In NYC, according to NYC Department of Education (DOE) data, nearly 25,000 students in grades 9 through 12 were reported as having experienced homelessness during the 2016-2017 school year

(ICPH, 2018). This number includes both accompanied and unaccompanied homelessness.

- According to 2017 NYC Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) data—based on a representative anonymous survey of NYC public high school students—during the 30 days before the survey, 4.8% of NYC high school students reported *usually* sleeping at a home of someone other than their parents or guardians because they had to leave their home or because their parent or guardian could not afford housing; 0.9% reported usually sleeping in a shelter or emergency housing; 0.5% reported usually sleeping in a motel or hotel; 0.3% reported usually sleeping in a car, park, or public place; 0.4% reported not having a usual place to sleep; and 0.6% reported usually sleeping somewhere else (NYC YRBS, 2017). At a combined rate of 7.5%, this suggests about 25,000[4] high school students experienced some form of homelessness as their usual sleeping situation within the 30 days prior to the survey. Again, this number includes both accompanied and unaccompanied homelessness. This number is notably similar to the DOE homelessness number presented in the ICPH report. However, the YRBS survey involves a narrower period (30 days rather than over a full school year), so the estimates are not completely comparable.
- The NYC YRBS also asks a separate question that captures *unaccompanied* experiences. That is, 9.2% of high school students (translating to about 30,000 students) reported having slept away from their parents or guardians in the past 12 months because they were kicked out, ran away, or were abandoned (NYC YRBS, 2017).

What are the characteristics of youth experiencing homelessness in NYC? The answer to this question depends, to some extent, on the data source, but notable trends are clear.

First, youth experiencing homelessness in NYC are overwhelmingly people of color. Among youth in unstable and unsheltered situations, 44% identified as Black, 41% as Hispanic/Latinx, 5% as other races, 6% as Multiracial, and 5% as White (NYC CIDI, 2018a). These numbers were based on a supplemental youth count

conducted by social services staff of participating youth service providers in conjunction with the City's point-in-time (PIT). DOE data indicate that an even higher rate of students experiencing homelessness (accompanied and unaccompanied) identify as Hispanic/Latinx (53%) (ICPH, 2018). The disproportionality of youth of color among those experiencing homelessness is consistent with national trends but to a much greater degree (Morton, Dworsky, Patel, & Samuels, 2018). These data underscore the need to center racial equity in NYC's homelessness prevention and response.

Second, youth experiencing homelessness in NYC disproportionately identify as LGBTQ. With respect to sexual orientation, about 58% of youth in unstable and unsheltered situations identified as straight, 15% as gay/lesbian, 16% as bisexual, and 12% as other, queer, or questioning (NYC CIDI, 2018a). Regarding gender identity, 8% identified as transgender, gender non-binary, or other, with the remaining identifying as male or female and cisgender. These rates are very high, even compared to national evidence that already shows non-heterosexual and non-cisgender youth disproportionately represented among those experiencing homelessness (Morton, Dworsky, Patel, & Samuels, 2018). These data clearly elevate the importance of LGBTQ-specific prevention strategies as well as safe and affirming housing and services for LGBTQ youth experiencing homelessness.

Third, the vast majority of counted youth experiencing homelessness in NYC are young adults, but these statistics might underrepresent valuable opportunities for early intervention with adolescents. Among youth counted as in unstable situations in the 2018 Youth Count, 6% were under the age of 18, 47% were ages 18-20, and 47% were ages 21-24. It is notable that the largest share of young people experiencing homelessness is on the older end of the spectrum. However, younger youths' experiences are likely to be more hidden (e.g., couch-surfing and doubling-up) and episodic (as minors tend to be earlier in their homelessness trajectories), and therefore less likely to get included in a PIT count that relies primarily on shelter and street-based counts.

Fourth, the majority of youth unaccompanied by a parent or

guardian in the 2018 PIT count were themselves pregnant or parenting. The high rate of pregnant or parenting youth experiencing homelessness reflects national trends, but to a greater degree (Dworsky, Morton, & Samuels, 2018). Indeed, 53% of NYC youth-headed households experiencing homelessness were accompanied by at least one child, and these households accounted for 17% of all of the families with children experiencing homelessness (HUD, 2018). This underscores the stark intersection of youth and family homelessness (HUD, 2018). Further to the point, 2,810 children accompanied the 2,422 parenting youth households counted as homeless on a single night. The youth and family homelessness systems and services in the city need to be positioned to provide an effective and coherent continuum of care that takes into account the unique developmental needs of a young person and of a young child, as well as the holistic needs of a family.

Method

To provide a comprehensive picture of the youth home-lessness system in NYC, we employed a mixed-methods approach. This included online surveys of communi-ty-based organizations (CBOs); a review of administra-tive data; focus groups and interviews with a range of adult stakeholders, including service providers, govern-ment officials, and other local experts; and focus groups with diverse youth with lived experience of homelessness. This was designed as a rapid system assessment, with the main research activities primarily taking place during the month of November 2018. Below, we briefly summarize each of the assessment's research components.

Agency data collection and rapid online survey of com-munity-based organizations (CBOs). To quickly syn-thesize existing information on the scale and scope of the challenge of youth homelessness in NYC (defining the needs of the population), as well as City Govern-ment-funded services[5] (system capacity to serve the pop-ulation), we made several requests of City agencies—via the NYC Center for Innovation through Data Intelligence (CIDI), a research/policy center in the Office of the Dep-uty Mayor for Health and Human Services. Through CIDI, we collected agency-level data on the number of youth experiencing homelessness served through different pro-gram types from two City agencies that fund many of the programs serving this population: the NYC Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) and the Department of Social Services (DSS), which includes the Department of Homeless Services (DHS) and the Human Resources Administration (HRA).

We also sent an online survey directly to CBOs through-out the city to collect information on the range of pro-grams and services that providers offer to youth ex-periencing homelessness, including program capacity, locations, and eligibility requirements. The survey asked broader questions on information such as the organi-zation's data practices and the respondent's views on key gaps in the system. We sent the survey directly to 24 organizations (e.g., youth, single adult, and family homelessness and housing service providers, most of which were initially identified by our City Government partners), and three other membership organizations shared the survey with their vast networks of relevant organizations in the city. Altogether, representatives of 21 organizations completed the survey (10 reported re-ceiving funding from DYCD, 5 from DHS or HRA, and the remaining did not report their funding source or report-ed other funding sources). The data collected through this survey do not provide a complete picture, as we do not have information from every provider in the city. This is particularly the case with respect to single adult and family homelessness services, which young adults can use. Still, this offers a useful starting point for glean-ing insights into the gaps and practices along the con-tinuum of services available to young people.

Stakeholder interviews and focus groups. Adult stake-holder interviews and focus groups gathered qualitative insights into the strengths and limitations of the current system to address youth homelessness, funding, inter-actions between agencies and organizations, data prac-tices, and promising efforts or opportunities to improve the system to expedite progress toward ending youth homelessness. Working with City Government partners, we developed a list of key informants from a range of relevant governmental and non-profit organizations in the city to participate in a combination of in-person and phone-based focus group discussions and semi-struc-tured interviews. This research component included representatives from key City agencies involved in de-livering services to youth experiencing homelessness (n=13);[6] representatives from a range of youth, single

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Table 1. Characteristics of youth focus groups participants

Characteristic	% (n)
Age	
18-20	43% (21)
21-25	57% (28)
Race/ethnicity	
Black	48% (22)
White	7% (3)
Hispanic	22% (10)
Other	24% (11)
Sexual orientation	
100% heterosexual	40% (19)
Other (LGBQ)	60% (29)
Gender	
Female	61% (30)
Male	20% (10)
Transgender female	2% (1)
Transgender male	2% (1)
Genderqueer	4% (2)
Other	10% (5)
Systems involvement	
Ever in foster care	34% (16)
Ever in juvenile detention, prison, or jail	20% (9)
Pregnant or parenting	20% (9)
Currently unstably housed	62% (28)
Age of first homelessness	
<16	15% (7)
16-18	50% (24)
19-25	35% (17)
Has a high school diploma/equivalent	65% (32)
Current education & employment status	
Currently enrolled in education	17% (8)
Currently employed	59% (27)

Note: Due to incomplete responses or surveys, totals do not add up to 53. Percentages are based on the number of responses for the given question.

adult, and family service providers (e.g., drop-in centers, crisis services programs and shelters, transitional housing, rapid rehousing, and supportive housing; *n*=25); and "other key informants"— such as researchers and advocates with other perspectives into the youth homelessness system in NYC (*n*=11). Altogether, 49 individuals participated in stakeholder interviews and focus groups.

Youth focus groups. These facilitated discussions captured young people's experiences and challenges with the City's youth homelessness system. We also asked for their thoughts on how the system could work better for youth. We designed the sampling strategy with a focus on maximizing diverse youth perspectives (see Table 1). Focus groups were conducted at five organizations' facilities in three boroughs, but participants had experiences of homelessness across much of the city and interacting with both DYCD and DHS services. Participants' program experiences included DYCD drop-in centers, DYCD crisis services programs, DYCD transitional independent living (TIL) support programs, DHS intake centers, DHS crisis shelters, family shelters, supportive housing, and rapid rehousing, among others. Some focus groups recruited youth with specific characteristics: one group of pregnant and parenting youth, one of LGBTQ youth, one of former foster youth, one of youth in rapid rehousing, and two of youth who had recently experienced homelessness but were currently in some form of stable housing. Because of the short assessment timeline and additional research and ethics complexities with including minors, our sample only included youth ages 18 and older, but we did ask youth about their experiences with homelessness and services as minors. Altogether, we conducted seven in-person focus groups with 53 youth.

Findings

This section presents qualitative and quantitative findings on each main segment of the youth homelessness system, with a subsection devoted to each segment: prevention; entry points; shelters, transitional housing, and temporary housing assistance; and stable housing.

Some of our findings are related to system capacity strengths or limitations that apply to several or all segments of the system, and we present these in a following subsection on crosscutting issues.

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Prevention

The system:

Prevention can involve 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. The form of prevention most often associated with homelessness is "diversion." Communities typically implement diversion services and assistance with the goal of resolving immediate housing crises that can lead to homelessness and therefore "diverting" someone from entering the homelessness system. Diversion services can include mediation with family members or landlords, legal representation for households facing eviction, or emergency rental or other financial assistance.

In contrast to diversion, some prevention interventions can take place upstream—for example, by addressing 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. Upstream prevention efforts can involve working with school systems to identify and support youth and their families as early as possible. Other prevention interventions may provide supports and services to youth engaged in public systems, such as behavioral health, child welfare, and justice systems, because of their particularly high risk for homelessness.

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 (Fuliehan & Newman, 2018). 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 ageing out of, foster care to support their stability and well-being.

Stakeholders described increased investments in certain aspects of homelessness prevention. These were generally related to overall homelessness diversion assistance through the City's Homebase program, from which some youth benefit. In 2018, Homebase enrolled 1,905 households headed by youth between the ages of 18 and 24 (CIDI, personal communication, 2019). One area of youth-specific prevention in which multiple stakeholders indicated progress was more stable transitions from foster care. In fact, several stakeholders lamented that other youth experiencing homelessness lack access to the transitional supports and services to which young people exiting foster care in the city are entitled. One stakeholder described comprehensive education and housing supports available for youth who recently exited foster care and stressed the potential value in extending such supports to all youth experiencing homelessness. "[We need] a homeless youth in a dorm project type of program [like foster care youth have]," they suggested. Similarly, when asked about promising models that could be applied to youth homelessness in NYC, for example, another stakeholder suggested,

> *If we just took what foster care was doing for older youth… for DYCD, what we have going on is a youth framework that says youth development, leadership; it's a positive youth framework. And it's saying that we want to put them through the system. And we want to get them to an independent living ability. Take those thoughts. Put it with the CoC. Take some of the stuff we learned from foster care, and we see that's really working to help foster youth be successful. Merge it all together, and we'll have something great.*

Indeed, while many young people who have been in foster care do experience homelessness, the evidence suggests significant progress. Anecdotally, stakeholders indicated policy improvements that supported youths' stable transitions out of foster care. Additionally, a recent analysis conducted by CIDI (2018b) showed that youth exiting foster care were not only more likely to get placed into supportive or subsidized housing, but they were also less likely to experience later homelessness or jail stays than other young people exiting shelters or transitional housing programs.

Overall, however, stakeholders described prevention as a major gap in NYC's youth homelessness system. Most homelessness prevention policies and resources were not tailored or targeted to youth, and study par-

ticipants frequently described the current system as "reactive." One stakeholder reflected, "[I]n general, as a field, not just New York City, we don't talk about prevention enough. We're very reactive. We're very reactive to situations. We're always triaging." Another stakeholder reinforced the point and referenced the need for a youth-specific approach to 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 because a lot of young people who are falling into the system, it's not like they're just walking off a cliff, right? They are walking away from bad situations, being pushed out of bad situations, and the question is, "What would heal that? What would prevent it?"*

Young people also spoke to the importance of prevention. One youth focus group participant, for instance, underscored the intergenerational importance of intervening early in a young person's trajectory into homelessness:

> *[T]he best intervention will be breaking the cycle. So once the youth homelessness thing is solved or gets better, then that youth… won't go onto their late twenties to have a child where that child is not supported when they're 17 or 18 like us and has to go through that system again. [I]t ends up costing you more money to whoever's funding or however it's being funded if you don't… solve a problem now. So I think it [takes] actually listening to us and what we're seeing…*

Because youth come into homelessness in a variety of ways, a youth-centered prevention approach warrants a coordinated City strategy. For older adults, eviction and domestic violence are major pathways into homelessness. Some young people also experience these pathways into homelessness and benefit from related services, but it is widely documented that other factors are more salient for youths' trajectories into homelessness. For youth, pathways into homelessness are more likely to involve family conflict and instability, childhood trauma, loss of caregivers, discrimination (especially for LGBTQ-identifying youth), systems involvement (and unsupported transitions from systems, such as behavioral health, juvenile justice, and child welfare systems), social-emotional difficulties, school disengagement and disruption, and a lack of positive connections (Martin & Sharpe, 2016; Morton, Dworsky, Samuels, & Patel, 2019).

As the recently published report, *The Roadmap for the Prevention of Youth Homelessness,* explains, "Youth homelessness is not just about a loss of stable housing, but a loss of a home in which young people are embedded in dependent relationships" (Gaetz, Schwan, Redman, French & Dej, 2018). As such, prevention policy for youth requires as much attention to young people's needs for natural supports and social relationships as it does to physical housing. For young adults, difficulties breaking into expensive housing markets, and sometimes facing the steep costs of post-secondary education, can also contribute to homelessness, especially when they lack natural supports to fall back on.

For prevention strategies to best meet the needs of young people, they need to specifically target young people (i.e., through schools, juvenile justice systems, child welfare systems, drop-in centers, and broader youth-serving organizations in the community) and the predominant contributors to their instability. The City could consider making its flagship Homebase homelessness prevention initiative more impactful for youth by further incorporating these types of targeting and design considerations, especially by centering the voices of youth with lived experience in potential Homebase redesign efforts on youth.

As starting points, the assessment highlighted two primary opportunity areas for strengthening the City's ability to curb the incidence of youth homelessness from happening in the first place or addressing it early enough to avoid an initial crisis from devolving to homelessness. These included (i) coordinated identification and care efforts across public systems and (ii) family strengthening, especially early in young people's experiences of difficulty.

Prevention requires efforts across public systems. Stakeholders highlighted a need for coordinated efforts across public systems, such as child welfare, the justice system, and the school system, to identify youth at risk for homelessness and deliver timely supports to prevent difficult situations from escalating to homelessness in the first place. As one adult stakeholder noted:

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

Others suggested that better real-time data sharing between City agencies could support prevention and early intervention efforts by helping to identify and support youth touching multiple systems, with particular attention to the populations of youth who are disproportionately represented across multiple public systems. There is significant potential to embed more systematic screening and identification tools and processes to capture risk for homelessness and housing instability among youth involved in justice and school systems – building on emerging examples across the country – to coordinate supports for these young people *before* they reach the point of crisis. Without such screening and identification processes, there will continue to be missed opportunities for prevention.

Family strengthening emerged as an area for prevention and diversion for some young people, especially if it takes place early in a young person's path to instability. One opportunity may be for systematic efforts to assess the youth for whom family reunification could be a viable option and have trained professionals to implement evidence-based family strengthening practices. Such an opportunity could function as an effective and cost-efficient alternative to shelter and housing programs for some young people. Further, given the high number of youth experiencing homelessness who cited discrimination and adversity in their households related to their sexual orientation or gender identity, youth- and family-centered counseling and support to young people's homes safe and affirming places as early as possible could prevent many tensions from escalating to homelessness.

Family strengthening could also be integrated into cross-system screening, early identification, and support efforts like those mentioned above to prevent homelessness for some youth. For instance, an evaluated Australian intervention, The Geelong Project, demonstrated significant reductions in student homelessness and early school leaving through a collaborative approach involving schools and community-based organizations, screening students for risk factors for homelessness with a universal survey administered in schools, and coordinating youth- and family-centered casework and interventions for students identified as at-risk (MacKenzie, 2018). With support from Chapin Hall, a small number of U.S. communities are now piloting this approach.

However, stakeholders described family strengthening as an intervention that would need to take place much earlier in trajectories into homelessness and instability. Even later in youths' experiences of homelessness, strengthened family connections could still help provide important emotional and practical supports to young people. Yet, for many youth experiencing homelessness, families were not seen as the likely source of safe and stable housing if family interventions were applied too late. As one adult stakeholder explained:

> *I feel like people talk about family strengthening, but I don't know if family strengthening is really the answer. 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. So I feel like the concept is good, but I don't think that it's effective all the time in this older group because, for a lot of them, much damage has been done.*

In this vein, several young people made remarks along the lines of, "I was staying with my mom, that wasn't good" or "I used to have a lot of problems with my father" or "I left my house because of domestic violence." For some youth, mediation or counseling would not provide an appropriate housing situation for them, while, for others, it might be possible. For example, one youth said:

> *I think [family interventions] should be an option because I do feel like some people…could have just resolved in talking to their parent or whoever they lived with. But I think for majority, no, I think it's just something that like, I mean we've gotten into this position for a reason whether it was good or bad or just, you know, life happens. I just feel like that it should be, there should be an option for that.*

Moreover, young people who came to NYC from other states or countries noted a lack of family altogether locally, precluding the possibility of family intervention as a primary path to stability. As one young person explained, "My dad, he's somewhere. My mom, she's back in Florida. I don't have any family. I'm the only person up here. So now I gotta', you know, right now at the age of 20, I have to be an adult." Given the high numbers of immigrant, refugee, and out-of-state youth in NYC (NYC Department of City Planning, 2013), traditional family strengthening interventions—for instance, that involve parenting interventions or conflict resolution between youth and their nuclear families—simply do not fit the circumstances of many youth experiencing homelessness in the city.

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Entry points

The system:

The primary entry points into the youth home-lessness 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 of Students in Temporary Housing.

The most common theme that emerged from discussions of the strengths of the City's youth homelessness system was the increasing availability of entry point services. Many of these discussions focused on drop-in centers, but also the range of services to which young people could be connected. As stated by one adult stakeholder:

> *I think, one, we have a system, right? Not everywhere has their own runaway and homeless youth system, so I think that's a positive. I think the fact that compared, again, to a lot of other places, we have a pretty vast array of other services. I think one of the most recent successes is that now we have funding to have 24-hour youth-specific drop-in centers in every single borough.*

Further, the City has substantially increased funding for school-based resources that have the potential to play a major referral and linkage role with the youth home-lessness system. In November 2018, DOE announced an increase of $12 million (on top of its existing $16 million investment) in resources to support homeless students (NYC DOE, 2018). The increased resources primarily support over 100 new "community coordinators" inside schools with a high percentage of children who lack stable housing, as well as additional training opportunities for educators and more regional managers who will oversee services.

Drop-in centers, complemented by outreach and referrals, function as the primary entry point, or "front door," into the City's youth homeless system. According to the community-based organizations survey, three times as many young people are reached daily through drop-in centers compared to street outreach. There are eight drop-in centers for youth in the city, and there are four youth-specific street outreach programs comprised of sixteen street outreach workers. Street outreach aims to connect youth with drop-in centers and to offer supports to youth who are not yet willing or ready to come into a drop-in center. The relatively high investments in drop-in centers versus street outreach makes sense given that many youth experiencing homelessness and housing instability are not necessarily "on the streets" (or easy to locate on the streets even when they are). Drop-in centers will likely continue to function as the principal entry point for youth in the system, with four out of seven organizations operating drop-in centers expecting growth in their capacity to serve more youth during the coming year, and only one out of four of the organizations operating street outreach programs reporting the same.

Interviews and focus groups underscored a clear and critical deficiency to a system-level response to youth homelessness: the lack of youth-specific 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 needs. Increasingly, communities are developing youth-specific coordinated entry, assessment tools, and systems. NYC currently lacks a youth-specific coordinated entry system.

One stakeholder spoke for many in stating, "[W]e still experience it as a very scattered and fragmented system, and we don't feel like we're anywhere near coordinated entry… The system doesn't encourage or support [inter-agency collaboration]." In the absence of a coordinated system and availability of information through formal resources, young people commonly relied on word-of-mouth. The following is a typical example from a young person's experience of navigating services:

> *I went to [program] one day, and a friend of mine told me about this program called [another program], and they helped out with housing and they feed you and there's a clothing closet and they have computers and they help you with jobs. And so I went and checked it out.*

The lack of a coordinated, system-level "front door" that is designed with youth in mind has significant implications for how young people experience the system. One adult stakeholder explained:

> *[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. They either can't enter at the right spot or they're in and they say, "Well, my ability to get what I need is capped by the provider's resources, so you guys are terrible at getting me supportive housing. I'm going to do an intake at this other center," and there's no real sense of following this person around… And now you have three staff people working on one person's case… And there is no universal consent form at drop-ins or for folks to communicate about cases as needed.*

Many youth reinforced the point and the need for more streamlined care coordination and ongoing support in navigating the system from a single person. "[T]he intake process is weird," they explained, "It's not [the same] person that you're gonna' see all the time, so I think that would be helpful." This lack of a coordinated "front door" seriously affected how young people experienced coming into, and going through, the youth homelessness system. Youth described getting "bounced around" between different shelters and programs, getting their hopes up about certain program or housing opportunities raised by social workers only to see those fall through, and the difficulty of having to retell their situations to many different people. Almost all of the youth focus groups discussed moving disjointedly between agencies to access services, resulting in a lack of service continuity, particularly related to emergency services. Two youth shared the following examples of disjointed experiences:

> *[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.*

> *A guy I knew, he took me to a men's shelter. I stayed there one night there. Then, I came back here because somebody from the staff told me to just come back in the morning, and they're going to be able to take me back in—keep in touch until I turn 21. But that didn't happen. So, they called some people for me, and they took me to another place. I stayed there for one night. Then, the next day, they took me to a different place.*

Adult stakeholders outlined significant barriers to the prospect of coordinated entry for youth, including differing approaches and philosophies among providers on the best ways to work with young people. As such, they described a need for more collective engagement of service providers and young people to develop a common way forward for everyone, at least in terms of developing a robust coordinated entry and assessment system for youth. Although the difficulties of establishing coordinated entry for youth would be significant, there are major benefits to providing young people a better "front door," especially in terms of youth having the ability to access a continuum of services and supports from across the system, rather than from any one service provider alone.

For young people, a better "front door" to the system also meant improving and streamlining how young

people learn about the resources available to them. All of the youth focus groups discussed learning about emergency shelter and housing providers through friends or family members. This leaves young people depending on the quality of information available through their informal networks. Some also reported finding services via an online web search or receiving information about services through street outreach or another agency. Drop-in centers served an important function as a system entry point for many young people, but, overall, young people's reflections portrayed a haphazard and uneven "front door" to the city's youth homelessness system. Similarly, many adult stakeholders—particularly service providers—acknowledged a lack of resources or infrastructure for creating awareness and offering inter-agency/inter-organization navigation around available programs and services.

In two focus groups, young people described how the combination of a robust awareness campaign and the use of technology could help young people obtain better information on where to go for help when they need it. Successful public health campaigns might offer useful examples for improving awareness among young people experiencing homelessness. For instance, existing campaigns in NYC around PrEP for reducing risk of HIV infection and the ThriveNYC mental health resources both present positive, ubiquitous messages to encourage help-seeking behaviors. Young people further suggested extending awareness messages and materials through public systems, for example, by posting information about where to get help on bulletin boards in schools or colleges or in standard pamphlets that are provided by counselors, case managers, probation officers, or other personnel in these systems. For young parenting families, such information might be shared in local childcare facilities or early education centers, or through home visitors.

Additionally, a common impediment youth cited was obtaining the correct documentation to access services. Requirements on needed documentation indicated by youth varied depending on the type of service but included birth certificates, government-issued IDs, and proof of homelessness status or duration (in the case of accessing some permanent housing resources). This often resulted in youth not accessing services or experiencing a delay in services. One youth explained:

Well, some [youth] may not have their documentations, like most of them you have to have your birth certificate or social and they don't even have that... You have to have a NY State ID or some type of form or something. So, it's like one thing that leads to another that leads to another that leads to another that leads to another.

For youth experiencing unstable and chaotic family environments, locating and accessing these sources of information may be difficult. Parenting youth families face the added challenge of maintaining crucial documentation on their children, such as birth certificates and social security cards.

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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,[7] which involves an organized network of caring adults who can provide temporary residence to youth experiencing homelessness.

There has been increased investment in services for youth experiencing homelessness, but stakeholders said more resources are necessary to meet the need. Increases were largely related to the number of shelter and transitional housing beds and the funded rates for operating those beds.[8] The number of "certified" beds located in programs funded by DYCD increased by 18% to 557 beds in 2018.[9] Numerous stakeholders discussed the impact of these investments on expanded service delivery. As one service provider explained, "I believe [funding has] pretty dramatically changed… The price per bed went up dramatically last year… So, we are opening multiple new sites as a result with the new funding." Such rate-based adjustments were noted by several stakeholders.

Still, many respondents were quick to underscore the significant shortage of resources compared to the level

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7. However, HRA does administer a non-youth specific program called Pathway Home, which enables families and individuals to move out of shelter by moving in with friends or family members ("host families") and providing monthly payments to those host families for up to 12 months. This program could be assessed to better understand the experience and outcomes of participants, as well as of host families, in order to inform decision-making around whether and how to develop youth host home programs in the city.

8. In FY 2015 through 2019, Mayor Bill DeBlasio increased RHY funding to support 500 additional beds and a new 24-hour drop-in center in Manhattan. In early FY 2018, the City Council passed several bills to expand services in substantive ways, including serving youth through age 24 rather than through age 20, and extending the allowable maximum stay from 60 days to 120 days for Crisis Service programs and from 18 months to 24 months for TIL support programs. In FY2019, NYC's First Lady Chirlane McCray's Unity Project invested in four new outer-borough 24-hour drop-in centers in the Bronx, Brooklyn, Queens, and Staten Island.

9. This estimate cannot be interpreted as a number of youth served because DYCD does not provide de-duplicated numbers for youth that had multiple service contacts.

of need. Some even presented a bleak picture of gains in funding against the backdrop of escalating costs, more stringent program requirements, and added accountability. "Poor funding has gotten worse and worse," lamented one stakeholder, "the city will say that they have increased funding, but what they have done is offer funding, but with even more deliverables than we had before." Stakeholders also described a lack of funding for capital and maintenance costs that are critical to making shelter and housing facilities viable to operate and well suited to the needs of youth.

Youth ages 16-20 are mostly served by youth-specific short-term housing and crisis services while older youth have to rely much more on single adult and family shelters. City agency-level data from DYCD and the DSS, compiled together with responses to the survey of community-based organizations, leads us to estimate a total of approximately 4,714 youth who are served daily through the City's short-term housing and shelter programs (4,829 if rapid rehousing spaces for youth, which are not City-funded, are included). About half of these youth are parents accompanied by children and staying in family shelters. On the surface, comparing this number to the number of sheltered and unsheltered youth who experience homelessness on a given night based on the 2018 PIT Count (about 4,600) suggests the supply of short-term assistance is adequate to the demand. However, a couple of important factors point to gaps below the surface.

First, as discussed in the introduction, PIT counts are generally viewed as underestimates of the full population of youth experiencing homelessness given the hidden nature of many youths' experiences and the variable participation in counts of programs and systems that serve these youth. Second, only about 14% of all youth in City-funded short-term shelter or housing programs on a given night were in *youth-specific* shelter or housing (funded by DYCD or DHS). Looking only at crisis/emergency shelters, 92% of the youth staying in crisis/emergency shelters are not in youth-specific shelters, but are in shelters serving the general population. This is largely because most youth staying in shelters are older youth (ages 21-24) who mainly have to stay in single adult and family shelters. When only considering younger youth, ages 16-20, the large majority (over 60% overall, and about 75% of single youth ages 16-20) stay in youth-specific crisis services, shelters, or transitional housing. In other words, it appears that, given age restrictions and

potential capacity issues with some youth-specific shelter and transitional housing programs, the vast majority of older youth in crisis have to rely on single adult and family shelter services for which "right to shelter" laws apply, and services are generally guaranteed.

Youth often described difficult experiences in crisis shelters—particularly those not designed for youth. Shelter experiences were frequently characterized as institutional, paternalistic, and uncomfortable. Such experiences were exacerbated in adult shelters where young people found themselves staying with people much older than their peer group and lacking access to developmentally appropriate supports or programming. These perspectives underscore the importance of making shelters more trauma-informed and responsive to young people's feedback. They also underscore the importance of a youth homelessness system that provides adequate options for youth to avoid or quickly transition from conventional shelters to safe and stable housing. As one youth explained:

> *I never usually just stay [at the shelter], you know it just makes me feel icky. So I would only stay at my friend's house. So… I didn't mind going [to the drop-in center] during the day, but sleeping [at the shelter] at night and you have to watch your stuff. You don't know who you'll be around.*

Other youth mentioned the lack of safety or security they felt when staying in the shelter and pointed to broader need for youth-specific resources that are sensitive to many youths' LGBTQ identities and to the needs of other specific populations, such as parenting youth.

Youth also expressed frustration with an overwhelming number of rules and restrictions in both youth and adult shelters and transitional housing. In particular, multiple young people struggled with curfew rules and suggested that these made it difficult for young people to pursue or maintain nighttime employment. In such cases, several young people portrayed a perilous choice between keeping a job and a having a place to sleep at night. The following quote illustrates the sentiments of many youth study participants:

> *[T]hat was another thing, and this is not specific to [DYCD-funded organization]; this is, like, towards all of them. 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.

While youth indicated that, in some cases, accommodations were made, decisions regarding the enforcement or flexibility of curfews or other rules varied significantly with different youth, staff members, or organizations.

Recent growth in the system's short-term shelter and housing capacity has taken place more with transitional housing than crisis shelters. While only one of the survey respondent organizations implementing a youth crisis shelter anticipated growth in the shelter's service capacity over the coming year, half of the organizations operating TIL support programs expected growth of those programs' capacity over the coming year. The Mayor's Management Report reveals a recent increase in DYCD's investment in transitional housing for youth experiencing homelessness with the number of youth in transitional housing having increased by 27% between 2017 and 2018 (Fuliehan & Newman, 2018). Yet, even with increased system capacity in some respects like transitional housing for youth, as indicated above, several stakeholders also described significant areas of underfunding in some aspects of these programs, such as capital and maintenance costs, and to support increased programming expectations.

Some youth described TIL support programs as at-capacity, which they said required waiting on a "first-come-first-serve" basis for others to leave in order to secure a spot. Given that DYCD numbers indicate an average of 23 to 29 TIL vacancies on a given night, this perceived capacity issue by youth might reflect capacity limitations with preferred programs (e.g., LGBTQ-specific TIL support programs for youth that feel more comfortable in such settings) rather than the overall capacity of the City's TIL support programs. Youth did, after all, commonly cite preferences for specific service providers whose services and reputations aligned with their specific needs and preferences. Deeper assessments of the system capacity should assess capacity not only overall but also more granularly with respect to how capacity for specific program delivery models and service providers aligns with young people's preferences.

Overall, there is a lack of flexible, quickly deployable interventions for youth that do not involve a residential program. Examples of flexible interventions that need not be offered in the context of a residential program

could include ongoing peer counseling or case management, rental assistance, or cash assistance. Only one organization that responded to the survey offered rapid rehousing for youth. This provider recently doubled spaces for youth. Additionally, a second youth service provider indicated that they too would be launching a rapid rehousing program for youth during the coming year. Several stakeholders expressed an interest in seeing more rapid rehousing available for youth for whom this intervention could be a good match, in order to help increase and hasten the flow of youth out of the shelter system. Given these developments, the composition of housing-based programs available to young people is likely to include a larger focus on rapid rehousing going forward. None of the service providers responding to the community-based organizations survey reported offering a host homes program.

The City needs stronger coordination between youth and family homelessness services. In NYC, as with much of the country, programs often lack the kinds of intersectional service delivery models that are needed. A program serving a young parent experiencing homelessness, for instance, needs to be able to effectively support the developmental needs of a youth, the developmental needs of the youth's child(ren), and the holistic needs of the family, as young people define family for themselves, which might also include significant others. Yet, even while the City offers relatively more housing and shelter services for parenting youth than non-parenting youth, these services do not appear to consistently account for the developmental needs of the parent as a youth, in addition to the needs of a family.

More intersectional work on youth and family service delivery models could be advanced jointly by DYCD and DHS. One stakeholder, for example, shared frustrations with a current system that required removal of young women from a youth-specific shelter and placement into family shelters that generally lacked youth development orientations. The stakeholder suggested, instead, that the City enable more youth-specific services to provide continuity for the young women upon becoming pregnant and increasing youth providers' capacity to meet child and family needs—e.g., childcare, parenting interventions, and early childhood development supports—as well.

Young people described the need for more developmentally appropriate supports to transition to stable

housing—**including dedicated housing specialists who understand young people's unique situations**. Many young people who access shelters and TIL support programs struggle to make successful transitions into stable housing. The City's significant lack of affordable housing is a major contributor to this problem, but young people also described shelters and residential programs as often ill-equipped to help facilitate transitions into stable housing. One gap to which several youth pointed is a lack of specialized housing navigation and placement support. "Housing specialists, actually, is where we're really lacking when it comes to shelters," said one youth. Another youth added, "Actual housing specialists, not people that… go look in the newspaper for an apartment." Further, to the extent that young people got this type of assistance, some described experiences with the City's systems squeezing youth into adult-centered service models. The following young person underscored the need for more strengths-based, youth-centric housing specialists and policies:

I'm gonna' keep saying this until we get there, if every single… provider [could have] housing specialists that are fit to deal with our age and not give me a plan for someone that's working, that's 35 and has a 401K… You know what I'm saying? I'm not really in the market to own right now. I'm not putting into my [401K], so you're like forcing me to get this huge deposit… are there other ways to like, to probably front this, are there other vouchers, or other, you know, government things like what are you giving me? Competent housing specialists that really are focused on making sure I have permanent housing. And not try to fix me, just help me get my permanent housing.

These comments underscore a broader sentiment that young people want the system to do more than respond to their current crisis. They called for quality supports in making transitions to stable housing and getting on a path to thriving.

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). These units include a mix of congregate and scattered site housing. 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 Authority (NYCHA) stopped accepting new applicants for Section 8 rental vouchers as of May 2007. NYC Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) continues to offer Section 8 vouchers through referrals from DHS or HRA providers, but it is unknown how many vouchers are provided to youth. NYCHA continues to accept applications for public housing, but it is unknown how many units are provided to youth. NYCHA prioritizes families with children. There are also some Section 8 and NYCHA priorities for foster care youth.

Service providers could offer a range of follow-up services in addition to, or instead of, housing—from ongoing case management, to home visiting, to career development support, to financial assistance—that can help young people achieve long-term stability and progress on a path to thriving. HRA currently offers follow-up services through Homebase, and some individual organizations have established follow-up programs or services funded through other sources.

In the context of steep rent prices that have significantly outpaced income growth and an overall shortage of affordable housing, vulnerable young people need targeted supports to attain stable housing. A shortage of affordable housing and related supports emerged as the most prominent gap in the system. One stakeholder spoke for many:

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.

Stakeholders underscored the need for both housing programs (e.g., supportive housing) and increasing the stock of affordable housing for youth. The affordable housing challenge is not isolated to youth, but youth

can face unique difficulties with accessing affordable housing, such as less employment and credit history, age-based biases in the rental market, and different preferences (e.g., housing in areas that are accessible to certain educational institutions, or sharing a lease with someone that is close in age).

Broader demographic and housing evidence underscores the urgency of the affordable housing crisis for youth in the city. According to a recent report by the NYC Comptroller's Office (2018), from 2005 to 2017, rising rents led to the disappearance of over 425,000 apartments renting for $900 or less (in 2017 dollars) in NYC's housing inventory. Apartments renting for over $2,700 per month more than doubled. Further, research by Harvard University's Joint Center for Housing Studies (2018) indicates that young adults are especially affected in large metro areas like NYC by escalating housing prices in the face of slow income growth and unprecedented levels of student debt.

Together, these factors are forcing more young adults than ever before to remain living with their parents—especially in large cities. Nationally, 52% of 22 to 24-year-olds and 28% of 25 to 28-year-olds lived with their parents in 2016, with the highest prevalence among Latinx/Hispanic youth (Federal Reserve, 2018). These rates are approximately double what they were a decade earlier, and the vast majority of young adults cited primarily financial reasons for remaining at their parents' residences. The rate of young adults living with their parents in NYC is even much higher than the national average (Zillow, 2018). Yet, for the many young people who lack safe and stable family environments as a housing safety net, this confluence of obstacles is a recipe for high levels of homelessness and housing instability. The present market situation requires significant and creative policy interventions to promote expansion of affordable housing stock aimed at vulnerable young people. As one service provider explained:

> *We need appropriate funding for continued permanent supportive housing, and… especially for young adults, we need to increase the affordable housing in New York City so that, as young adults gain the skills to live without supportive housing, there is affordable housing available to them.*

Stakeholders highlighted increased supportive housing resources, but also difficulty for many youth to access them. Some specifically discussed the opportunity

for youth in the Mayor's NYC 15/15 Supportive Housing Initiative, which aims to develop 15,000 units of supportive housing over a 15-year period. Further, historically, youth have faced particular difficulties in accessing supportive housing compared to older adults who tend to present greater system contacts or other vulnerability characteristics that increase their likelihood of getting prioritized for these resources. In response, the City has considered youths' situations more concertedly in developing eligibility requirements for NYC15/15 as well as the Standardized Vulnerability Assessment that is under development to capture youth-specific experiences.

The NYC15/15 allocation includes 247 scattered site young adult single units, 180 scattered site pregnant or parenting young adult units, 989 congregate young adult single units, and 361 congregate pregnant or parenting young adult units (CIDI, personal communication, 2018). With NYC 15/15 funding, at least one provider in the stakeholder discussions indicated that both scattered and congregate supportive housing units would be set aside for young adults and young adult families.

Nonetheless, youth and adult stakeholders described young people's chances at obtaining permanent housing resources like "winning the lottery"—underscoring a general sentiment of scarcity and randomness in pursuing these resources. One youth, for instance, explained that "it's like a lottery." This particular comment was made in reference to supportive housing, but young people made similar comments with respect to accessing affordable housing units: "You have [to have] like extreme, I mean like extreme, circumstances where you have a great priority number. The housing lottery's going to take you time," they added.

There is a range of stable housing resources that could be further leveraged for youth through a more streamlined and coordinated system of care between DHS and DYCD, among others. During the past year, DHS reported 914 "subsidized exits" of young adults, under age 25, from DHS shelters into housing. These included a mix of term-limited and long-term placements, including:

- ***CityFHEPS*** (accounting for most of the DHS subsidized exits) – a rent supplement administered by HRA to help low-income individuals and families move out of HRA or DHS shelter and into stable housing, offering up to five years of assistance. The supplement is also available for families with children

and individuals at risk of entry to shelter.

- **_Pathway Home_** – a program administered by HRA that enables families and individuals to move out of shelter by moving in with friends or family members ("host families") and providing monthly payments to those host families for up to 12 months. To be eligible for the program, families and individuals must have resided in shelter for at least 90 days.
- **_Special One Time Assistance (SOTA)_** – a rental assistance program for DHS clients that provides one year of full rent up-front. Eligibility is restricted to working families with children, or families who receive SSI/SSD, and have been in DHS shelter for at least 90 days (as well as single adults who entered shelter before April 1, 2018).
- **_Enhanced One-Shot Deals (EOSD)_** – a program administered by HRA that assists homeless working families in the shelter system to leave the shelter and return to independent living with a one-time payment (for up to four months' rent, broker's fee, furniture allowance, and other move in expenses). To be eligible, families or individuals must be employed and have resided in the NYC shelter system for at least 60 days.

Youth who receive supports through HRA to help them achieve stability described an arduous process of paperwork, but one that was worth it for those fortunate enough to get support:

> *Paperwork is tremendous. It was a lot of paperwork, but at the end of the day it was, it was worth it. Because you got your own place. And for me, I just had to go... if you don't have a job just go to HRA. And get cash assistance. And they give you enough for you to pay your rent. And they give you enough for furniture and all of that, so it was really a big deal that I got that… And cash assistance, so now I can go buy some soap, or some change of clothes. I don't have to walk around funky now. So it made it a little easier now that I got that.*

Yet, despite the potential of mainstream resources to better serve youth, there was a common view that youth are often disadvantaged, compared to older adults, in trying to access mainstream stable housing resources (exceptions were parenting youth and youth who recently exited foster care). For example, study participants described how rental vouchers can only be accessed through the adult homelessness system, which presents a barrier for youth. NYCHA stopped accepting new applicants from the general public for Section

8 rental vouchers as of December 2009. HPD continues to offer Section 8 vouchers, and applicants must be referred through DHS or HRA providers. The following statement by a youth study participant illustrates the dissatisfaction expressed by many young people with having to access mainstream resources like rental vouchers through single adult and family homelessness shelter system:

> *Currently, in New York City, you cannot access… affordable housing vouchers through a youth shelter. You have to do it through a DHS shelter. And, currently, there'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.*

Young people commonly expressed a desire to be able to access mainstream resources through better coordinated systems of care, which include the ability to access such supports through youth services funded by DYCD without having to go through older adult-oriented systems.

Pregnant and parenting youth in particular appear to benefit from DSS stable housing resources. Of the 914 subsidized exits of young adults from DSS shelters, 710 (78%) were pregnant or parenting. The availability of such resources for young families is critical. A vast literature demonstrates the high risk of pregnant and parenting youth for homelessness as well as the significant adverse developmental implications that homelessness has for both young parents (given adolescence and young adulthood as key developmental stages) and for their babies or young children (with prenatal and early childhood as the first critical developmental windows).

At the same time, this implies a need for increasing access to stable housing resources among non-parenting youth as well. Indeed, many youth in focus groups perceived greater ease with accessing housing resources for parenting than non-parenting youth. One youth observed, "it's like the more kids you have the more serious they're gonna' take it, so we might as well just have five or six kids. For real. Then they give you big apartments and all that."

Stakeholders championed the importance of specialized "follow-up" or "aftercare" services to young people for a period after they exit a shelter or housing program. The interviews and focus groups underscored that stability is about much more than having a place to

live; it is also about the continued supports that young people who have faced significant life adversity need to remain stable and to thrive. These can include ongoing casework, home visiting, mental health services, facilitating natural connections with supportive adults, and education or career development programs, among others. In general, however, few organizations had the resources or capacity to extend structured aftercare services to young people. An exception of a service provider that offers aftercare services in the form of home visiting was described in the following way:

> *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. So, instead of the landlord, if they have any kind of complaints or challenges with the youth, they call us instead. So, to me, aftercare is the piece. There has to be an aftercare person that follows these young people once they leave shelter. There has to be.*

To this end, some stakeholders advised the City to consider systematically funding a period of aftercare services and supports for youth exiting temporary housing or shelter programs. Youth experiencing homelessness face daunting adversities in addition to an unaffordable housing market. These challenges rarely disappear during stays at shelters or residential programs. Whereas more advantaged youth in our society have family-based supports and safety nets to continue to rely on as they move further into independent adulthood, young people who experienced homelessness expressed a need for extended supports through City programs and services in the absence of such socioeconomic advantages.

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Crosscutting issues

Some issues related to the system capacity to prevent and end youth homelessness in NYC are not specific to any one segment of the system. Instead, they have implications that cut across multiple or all parts of the system. They affect the underlying mechanics of how the youth homelessness system functions. This section outlines some of the most prominent crosscutting issues that the assessment surfaced.

Many stakeholders lauded an emerging City-level response to youth homelessness. Investments in addressing the challenge have increased. DYCD in particular recently saw growth in its services and programs for this population, including drop-in services, street outreach, and residential services.[10] Furthermore, through NY 15/15, additional supportive housing resources will be made available to youth experiencing homelessness. Beyond funding, discussions frequently alluded to a recent increase in policymakers' attention and the growing ability of service providers to do great work because of more knowledge sharing, support, and general prioritization of the issue. The following adult stakeholder quote illustrates this view:

> *For a while, I feel like no one was talking about homeless youth. I don't know what happened. And then all of a sudden, every budget cycle, every legislative session, there's something about homeless youth.*

Several stakeholders described recent efforts within the City to coordinate the collective response to youth homelessness as a critical step in the right direction. "The creation of the senior consultant for youth homelessness in the Deputy Mayor's Office was huge," explained one stakeholder, "That's been a game changer." On the hiring of this consultant, another stakeholder similarly said:

> *We have an individual who is able to bring the different stakeholders together… it's DHS, it's DYCD, it's ACS, it's HPD… So, I would say that has been a plus.*

This aspect of the system capacity might be fragile, however, as the position responsible for coordinating the City's efforts on youth homelessness is currently privately funded as a temporary consultancy, and the City has not yet made a public commitment to its continuity.

Collective impact emerged as an important theme, and a reminder of how civil engagement contributes to a stronger City response to complex challenges like youth homelessness. One stakeholder, for instance, described how concerted advocacy for 24-hour drop-in centers for youth resulted in an expansion from one to five 24-hour drop-in centers in the city. Others highlighted how sustained advocacy within the City had contributed to greater investments in transitional supports and services for youth aging out of foster care, LGBTQ-specific services, and structures—like the Youth Action Board—for meaningful and paid participation of youth with lived experience of homelessness in the City's policy-making processes.

These examples illustrate ways in which collective strategies and advocacy efforts can improve the system for addressing youth homelessness. At the same time, stakeholders also signaled significant limitations to the collective capacity of community-based organizations to advocate effectively for a better system for youth experiencing homelessness.

The assessment found a need for further deepening collaboration between City agencies, as well as a lack of institutional ownership and accountability for coordinating the City's response to youth homelessness. Youth homelessness is complex, and the population and its needs span the resources, expertise, and jurisdictions of multiple City agencies. No one agency can prevent

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10. *In FY 2015 through 2019, Mayor Bill DeBlasio increased RHY funding to support 500 additional beds and a new 24-hour drop-in center in Manhattan. In early FY 2018, the City Council passed several bills to expand services in substantive ways, including serving youth through age 24 rather than through age 20, and extending the allowable maximum stay from 60 days to 120 days for Crisis Service programs and from 18 months to 24 months for TIL support programs. In FY2019, NYC's First Lady Chirlane McCray's Unity Project invested in four new outer-borough 24-hour drop-in centers in the Bronx, Brooklyn, Queens, and Staten Island.*

and end youth homelessness on its own. As such, deeper collaboration between City agencies on this issue is critical. At the same time, an expressed underlying constraint to a true system-level response to youth homelessness is the lack of clarity on which agency or office within City Government possesses responsibility for facilitating the level of collaboration needed and spearheading the overall effort to prevent and end youth homelessness in NYC.

Multiple City agencies hold responsibility for funding or operating key services for youth experiencing homelessness, presenting a complex institutional web of services that are needed in the overall youth homelessness system. Key agencies include the Administration for Children's Services (ACS), DHS and HRA—both under DSS, the Department of Education (DOE), the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH), DYCD, the Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD), and the NYC Housing Authority (NYCHA). Adding to the complexity, these agencies fall under the jurisdictions of three different Deputy Mayors and a Chancellor. Two of the most central agencies in delivering services for youth experiencing homelessness (DHS and DYCD) are overseen by two different Deputy Mayors (DHS by the Deputy Mayor for Health and Human Services and DYCD by the Deputy Mayor for Strategic Policy Initiatives). The Senior Consultant currently coordinating the City's response on youth homelessness is situated in the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Health and Human Services. Meanwhile, state regulation pertaining to runaway and homeless youth places "designation and responsibilities of the runaway and homeless youth service coordinator" in each locality's youth bureau, which, in the case of NYC, is DYCD.[11]

It is clear that preventing and ending youth homelessness in NYC requires the actions and resources of various systems and agencies. Yet, some focus groups and interviews alluded to the importance of having a single entity that has the authority, capacity, and ownership to lead the "youth homelessness system" response—that is, the coordination of City activities and resources guided by a common youth-centered strategy or framework. One adult stakeholder described the current predica-

ment in the following way:

> *Nobody wants to take ownership of youth homelessness… there are some pieces that DHS will take ownership for, and some pieces DYCD will take ownership for. It just feels piecemeal; it doesn't feel holistic… Somebody at City Hall needs to be explicit about who owns youth homelessness. Because it's very explicit on who owns adult homelessness. What city agency will be the lead doing this? I think that has been wishy-washy.*

As this observation reflects, there were particular concerns regarding role clarity between DYCD and DHS. On the one hand, DYCD holds the City's runaway and homeless youth programs and has youth development expertise. On the other hand, DHS holds significantly more resources for homelessness and housing overall, it is obligated by the city's "right to shelter" law, and young adults fall into DHS services' single adult and family homelessness populations.

Further, certain age groups of youth experiencing homelessness fall in "in-between" spaces of different agencies. For instance, unaccompanied minors might be appropriately supported by either ACS (the child welfare system) or DYCD (runaway and homeless youth services), depending on the young person's situation, and young adults, ages 21 and older, were both too old to be eligible for some key services funded by DYCD and too young to feel safe, comfortable, or developmentally supported by adult or family homelessness services operated by DHS.

Youth focus groups frequently cited gaps in supports related to these artificial age-based institutional parameters. The following exchange in one youth focus group underscores how traumatizing and destabilizing a lack of a coherent continuum of services due to insufficient capacity and artificial age parameters can be for young people:

> *[First youth starts:] [B]ecause I've been that in-between, between 21 and 24, I don't get priority when it comes to space and when it comes to beds… So at the overnight, I only got that bed for not even two weeks. I got it for a week and two days. And then a whole bunch of more people started coming*

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11. *Subpart 182-1 Runaway and Homeless Youth Regulations for Runaway and Homeless Youth Crisis Services Programs.*

in because it was the summer… so a lot of kids were still coming through. So for the whole month of July, I was always referred out. Like everybody. I would come try to sign up for a bed, I was working, so I was supposed to have a bed reserved… I was working at H&M, I was working at Olive Garden. Like, I was really out here on these streets... Came off of work, my third day at H&M. Closing. They told me I no longer had a bed…

[Second youth adds to the age discussion]: I first became homeless I was 18, I was just outside, couch surfing, just staying on rooftops, then I come to [DYCD-funded RHY program]… They're one of the best shelters… the most comfortable... I was like, 19, so even for the overnight they would always prioritize me on the list 'cause I was like 19 or 20, and then I was in their housing program. But when I turned 21, they kick you out, like, when you turn 21. So even if you-, like in the program and you 21, they will kick you out… [Y]ou turn 21 and regardless of you knowing where you're going to go or not, you have to leave. That's traumatic.

Institutional ownership is needed in order to look at the full spectrum of youth experiencing homelessness and ensure that their needs are adequately met with a cohesive system. As reported in the prevention section, some stakeholders contrasted the City's fragmented institutional arrangements for youth homelessness to the much more unified system and set of resources for youth transitioning out of foster care. Indeed, several stakeholders felt that the foster care system could be examined as an example in the process of constructing a more coherent system to prevent and end youth homelessness.

Youth and adult stakeholders described a lack of overall care coordination between programs and systems. There is a general lack of formal systems and mechanisms to help youth and the social workers working with them to identify resources that meet the young person's needs and preferences from across the system, connect young people with those resources, and track and facilitate participation in those services. One stakeholder spoke for many in describing a "vacuum" of coordination, noting that providers "do exactly what the city does, which is operate in silos."

Several service providers described ongoing efforts to mitigate the risks of fragmentation, most of which were informal and relationship-based efforts to collaborate with other service providers. However, they generally framed these efforts as taking place in spite of the City's institutional arrangements and incentive structures, rather than because of them. Moreover, several service providers underscored the problematic implications of this reliance on relationships and youths' self-advocacy alone as the basis for coordinating support. Several study participants suggested that the charisma of the youth and the connections of their social worker were the most important factors to determining whether a young person received the services they needed in a timely manner. The following stakeholder quote illustrates the point:

[Regarding young people's successful transition from programs] it's very much dependent on the relationships that the program has with other programs. Unfortunately, like everything, it shouldn't be this way, but it's a lot of who you know. If I've been doing this a long time, someone may take my call or look at my application for a young person before someone that they don't know, or they've never worked with before. And that's where I think it's unfortunate that there's so much room for human error in a young person's ability to successfully exit homelessness.

Discussions with youth revealed how important a young person's sense of agency frequently was to enabling their access to services and ability to maneuver the system more successfully than others. When asked what piece of advice youth would give to other young people trying to navigate the system, many agreed on the importance of assertiveness and knowing what services were available. One youth share the following:

You go to your case manager and go, "I need this. I need this. I need this." Because when I went to [organization], I would literally throw tantrums like, "Do this for me! I need this. This is what I need. Because I'm tired of, I'm tired of sleeping on the streets." So you gotta' make it happen because nobody's gonna' make it happen for you.

Young people commonly described case workers across the system as lacking either the will or the bandwidth to help them transition from one program or service to another. As a result, young people often felt they had to navigate largely on their own. There were some exceptions, with young people describing certain program staff as going out of their way to follow a young person through service connections and checking on their sta-

tus, but these cases appeared to be limited and variable. In particular, youth indicated wanting more guidance and coordinated support in order to reach stability. One youth recommended the following:

There should be a checklist of things that you need to do until. So if… you came in [and] you don't have documents, getting documents; you're not full-time employee, getting employed; you have a certain amount of money saved up after a certain amount of things are checked off the list… Because the reality is when you leave here right now… to my knowledge, there's no set thing about what's next. So… if you leave here and you have $20,000 saved up, and you don't have a perfect credit score, you could go out and get an apartment and just put more on it. But what's the reality of you actually keeping that and not wanting to revert back to square one because there was no goal plans set for you.

Youth discussed difficult interactions with staff across the spectrum of services—often highlighting a misunderstanding of developmental expectations for youth, low interpersonal engagement, or a lack of trauma sensitivity. Youth frequently perceived some staff as showing favoritism, lacking empathy, and not providing enough guidance and support to all youth equitably. Further, while many young people raised feelings of discomfort or insecurity in general adult facilities, feelings of friction with, and paternalism by, staff also came up in reference to runaway and homeless youth service providers too. Overall, youth demanded a system that better responded to young people based on their strengths and dignity:

[T]hey think we're damaged goods, and they're trying to fix us instead of helping us. [Another youth adds:] Because they swear it's because we're young and we're homeless something is wrong with us, and there's nothing wrong with us. People just come from [screwed up] situations or some people are just not accepted, or some people just can't live their true self being around family.

Some youth suggested that there might be less of a disconnect between youth and staff if there were more staff in programs who were closer to their age, had lived experience of homelessness, and reflected the diversity of the young people served. One youth said:

Have you been homeless? No. Have you ever gotten kicked out? No. Have you ever gone a day without food? No. So, how

can you really generally help us? You get what I'm saying, like it has to really be passionate. You have to have been through it to really give us a lot of stuff.

Youth also felt that some staff treated them like children and did not provide them with enough freedom. While such comments generally related to shelters and transitional housing, at least one young person raised similar issues of restrictive rules with respect to supportive housing. A young person who thought they would experience more freedom and independence once they transitioned to supportive housing reflected the following frustration:

[H]ere [in supportive housing], I feel like I'm still in the shelter. They sign us in and out. We can only have three guests at a time. It don't matter what it is, but they sold this dream. Do you understand this stuff that we're supposed to have? All the stuff that he was going to be able to do before we moved there and as soon as we moved in here it was like, oh never mind.

Higher quality and better-used data were identified as essential to a dynamic, system-level approach to preventing and ending youth homelessness. The assessment specifically explored the current system capacity on data and opportunities for strengthening data collection and utility. Key opportunities emerged along three themes: (i) common data platforms and/or data sharing, (ii) common outcomes measurement, and (iii) longitudinal data collection on outcomes. In each of these areas, agencies and organizations should collect, report, and use data disaggregated by race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, and parenting status in order to identify and address any disparities in young people's experiences of homelessness, service placements, or outcomes.

Common data platforms and/or data sharing. Organizations used a variety of different data systems, which were frequently linked to different funding sources, often at different levels (city, state, and federal). Figure 2 shows the different data systems used according to responses to the community-based organizations survey. Interagency efforts to bring different organizations onto a common data system could help to reduce administrative burden on service providers while enabling a more complete picture of youth engaged in the system and their outcomes. With common data systems and data sharing agreements, service providers would be positioned to better coordinate care and minimize the num-

ber of times a young person has to repeat information for service providers.

Common outcomes measurement. In 2012, USICH, in collaboration with multiple federal agencies, developed a *Federal Framework to End Youth Homelessness*, which included four core outcome areas for youth-level assessment, service planning, and monitoring: stable housing, permanent connections, education and employment, and social-emotional wellbeing. According to the CBO survey, providers were most likely to collect data on education or employment (67%), and least likely to collect data on permanent connections (48%), at program exit. At the system-level, stakeholders explained "there are no set standard data elements that the City collects on young people." If a program received funding from HUD, programs would report the Homelessness Management Information System (HMIS) data elements, while DYCD-funded programs would collect information on DYCD-determined data elements, but there were no common system-level data elements captured to guide a system-level, outcomes-driven approach to youth homelessness.

Longitudinal data collection. Several stakeholders championed the need for longitudinal data on young people's outcomes, especially several months or even years after they exit programs. This need was framed as critical to shifting the focus and success of the system from simply managing a young person's crisis to helping them achieve sustained housing stability and get on a path to thriving.

[T]he thing is to longitudinally collect data on young people's

outcomes … for one to two years after young people exit any service provider in New York City. If you had that data, you could then see what service providers are exiting youth to permanent housing that enable them to flourish in life. Without that data, you're stuck in a lens of looking at only how young people are faring while they're housed in a system or in a program, but not what happens when they exit that housing or what happens when they exit that system.

A shift to longitudinal data collection, however, is not a simple matter. As Figure 3 shows, while 48-67% of CBOs reported collecting information on outcomes at program exit (except for physical health, at 33%), only 24-33% collected any follow-up data on these outcomes following program exits. While important to a better system, however, stakeholders cautioned against adding longitudinal outcome measurement as a requirement of organizations without adequately resourcing and supporting such a change. Collecting more longitudinal outcomes data at the system level would likely require significant investments and reforms or access to other key data sources that might provide information on youth outcomes over time and across domains.

Youth leadership and collaboration is an emerging system strength, but with much room for growth. One strength in the City's current system is its Youth Action Board (YAB). The YAB is comprised of youth with lived experience and was formed in 2016. NYC's application to HUD's Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program funding was the initial impetus for the YAB's formation,
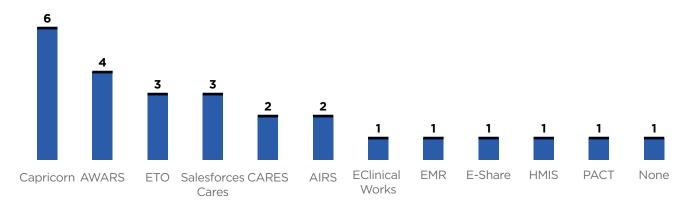
Figure 2. Number of organizations using various data systems (n=21)

Source: Community-based organizations survey.

which is required for the grant. Although the City was unsuccessful in its first bids for this grant funding, it has preserved the YAB through DHS funding without federal funding as part of its commitment to advancing a coordinated response to youth homelessness that includes youth as partners to this end. The YAB is represented on the City's Youth Homelessness Taskforce and the board of the Continuum of Care (CoC)[12] and consulted on CoC plans to prevent and end youth homelessness. The YAB is funded by the CoC via DSS and convened and supported by the Coalition for Homeless Youth, a non-profit membership and advocacy organization focused on youth homelessness serving New York State. Indeed, one stakeholder attributed increased funding in the city, in part, to more organized youth voice.
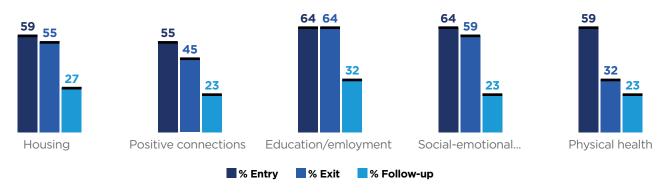
However, few adult stakeholder interviews or focus groups organically spoke to youth leadership or collaboration as a strength, gap, or opportunity area in the City's youth homelessness system. This general omission of the subject is surprising given the increased attention by federal agencies and national advocacy organizations working on youth homelessness and the calls among youth for more leadership opportunities in this space. Specific questioning on this topic might have revealed more insight, but the general omission of the subject in study participants' natural discussion signals that an emphasis on youth leadership and collaboration is not yet part of the service paradigm in NYC. Perhaps as a further indication, only 6

(29%) of the 21 service providers that completed the CBO survey reported that they had an active committee, council, or board of youth or young adults with lived experience of homelessness. As such, while the YAB reflects a positive development in the system, there appears to be much room for growth in the system's integration of youth leadership and collaboration more broadly.

Youth need a range of housing and program options to allow for tailored service delivery. Figure 4 presents a snapshot of the system capacity by program types available, according to the CBO survey and to data received from City agencies. The City relies largely on physical drop-in centers for "entry points," crisis services, shelters, and TIL support programs for "shelters and transitional housing," and permanent supportive housing for "stable housing." As reported earlier, a relatively large number (914) of young adults had subsidized exits from DHS shelters. However, almost 8 out of 10 of these went to parenting youth. Given the number and diversity of youth experiencing homelessness in NYC, the City's system capacity could benefit from expanding its inventory of options to meet the diverse needs and preferences of young people that come into the system. For example, interviews and focus groups with youth and adult stakeholders highlighted opportunities to consider diversifying within these segments of the system continuum:

- *Entry points* with more ways to access information about the system as a whole. Drop-in centers are an

Figure 3. Organizations reporting collecting outcomes data at different junctures (n=21)

% Entry   % Exit   % Follow-up

Source: Community-based organizations survey.

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12. *A CoC is a regional or local planning body that coordinates housing and services funding—usually primarily from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) for homeless families and individuals.*

important resource for spreading awareness to youth about the resources available to them, but they require young people to know about and travel to physical centers. One idea that was offered to complement drop-in centers and other current resources was a technology-based platform (e.g., a dynamic website and phone-based app) that provides opportunities for youth to access information on available services and engage with service providers in a more self-managed way;
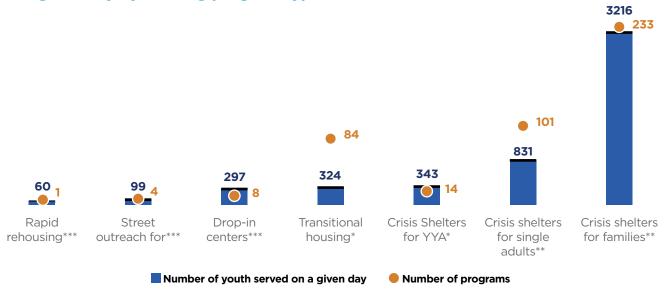
- *Shelter and transitional housing* could be complemented by additional temporary assistance options such as youth-oriented rapid rehousing programs, cash assistance, informal housing assistance such as through supporting young people's natural connections or facilitating host home arrangements, and intensive case management;

- *Stable housing* programs including less intensive resources than permanent supportive housing for lower-vulnerability youth, such as youth-specific rental vouchers with support services, facilitating shared housing arrangements, and other affordable housing options.

A recent systematic evidence review undertaken by Chapin Hall revealed a dearth of evidence-based shelter and housing models for youth (Morton, Kugley, Epstein, & Farrell, 2019). Many program approaches commonly used in practice have not been rigorously evaluated. Of the interventions described above, intensive case management, supportive housing, and rental assistance (for two years) coupled with case management and wraparound services have each shown positive impacts on young people's housing stability based on at least one rigorous effectiveness study.

Overall, the intervention examples highlighted above should be taken as possibilities for more a varied inventory of programs informed by youth and stakeholder inputs, but these should be evaluated if implemented in NYC. A City commitment to rigorous evaluation of different program models for different youth will provide better evidence to optimize its inventory of programs over time. Ultimately, an updated portfolio of programs should be devised strategically in light of a system-level theory of change that is guided by the best available evidence and meaningful input of youth with lived experience.[13]

This report presents a first-of-its-kind assessment of the youth homelessness system in NYC. The assessment

Figure 4. A snapshot of daily service: Number of youth served on a given day by housing program type

Number of youth served on a given day   **Number of programs**

Program	Number of youth served on a given day	Number of programs
Rapid rehousing***	60	1
Street outreach for***	99	4
Drop-in centers***	297	8
Transitional housing*	324	84
Crisis Shelters for YYA*	343	14
Crisis shelters for single adults**	831	101
Crisis shelters for families**	3216	233

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13. *Similarly, a broader homelessness system assessment conducted by Future Laboratories for Seattle/King County identified the lack of a system-level theory of change as a critical gap to the system's functioning and provided guidance for addressing this gap. The online report can be accessed at: https://hrs.kc.future.com/actions.*

Looking across the system, study participants underscored that ending youth homelessness in NYC will require greater investments in a coordinated combination of youth-oriented housing (especially low-barrier, long-term housing options) and supportive services (especially mental health, education, and career development services). The survey of community-based organizations included an open-ended question for respondents to indicate key gaps they saw in the system's capacity to address youth homelessness overall. Responses highlighted the following gaps: supportive housing (n=8), especially LGBTQ-affirming resources; services for young adults, ages 21-24 (n=7); specialized youth-oriented services for the most at-risk and hard-to-place youth, such as those with mental health disorders or chemical dependencies (n=6); vouchers or flexible assistance for long-term stable housing (n=5); and homelessness prevention and diversion interventions (n=4). Some respondents also noted gaps in broader public assistance, income and career support, crisis shelters for heterosexual young men, and life skills programming.

When speaking specifically to funding gaps during focus groups and interviews, adult stakeholders most commonly articulated a desire to see more funding in long-term services that ensured young people's sustained exits from homelessness. These generally involved a combination of stable housing resources, ongoing casework and advocacy following the transition from a shelter or temporary housing program, mental health services, facilitation of positive connections in young people's lives, life skills development, and financial, educational, and career development assistance designed to bolster young people's economic empowerment. Youth focus groups underscored this theme of needing more resources and support that go beyond crisis management to aiding their long-term stability. Focus groups mostly commonly referenced the need for more and better support services linked to temporary housing programs, but they were also sometimes discussed in the context of stable housing resources, such as permanent supportive housing, long-term rental assistance, and aftercare services.

Further, both youth and adult study participants highlighted the interconnectedness of different types of supports to facilitating young people's long-term stability and independence. This interconnectedness emphasizes the importance of delivering these supports through effective care coordination, not as fragmented programs. One adult stakeholder explained the interconnectedness of different supports in the following way:

> *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.*

Many service providers indicated the need for more and better mental health resources, especially on-site services so that young people do not have to travel across the city chasing appointments. As the City strengthens its system-level response to youth homelessness, there may be opportunities to forge better connections between youth homelessness services and mental health services available, for instance, through ThriveNYC, a NYC initiative to create a mental health system that works for everyone.

Not only did stakeholders describe a vast unmet need for mental health services for young people, but some also described mental health difficulties as a constraint to accessing housing programs. This highlights the need for developmentally-appropriate, low-barrier housing options for all young people as well as the need for housing options that have adequate services available for youth who present significant behavioral health needs. As one adult stakeholder explained:

> *One of the biggest issues is we're making them homeless again; we're re-traumatizing them. They go to a program, and the program has such high standards for these people… "You've got these mental health issues? Oh, we can't deal with that. You can't live here." A lot of the times, the starting and the stopping and the cycling through is because the system doesn't know how to work with young people that have these extraordinary needs.*

The need for the system to better coordinate and deliver educational and career developments supports also emerged frequently in focus groups with both youth and adults. When study participants discussed employment, they encouraged a focus that transcends "getting a job" to supporting career paths that lead to a viable income and benefits. Several youth and adult study participants felt that current employment-related programming available through youth homelessness services is too narrowly focused on short-term, low-paid employment without supporting longer-term career and income growth prospects. The following adult stakeholder quote reflects this sentiment:

> *I don't know that programs currently are able to really invest in helping young people figure out a career path that will enable them to live, rather than just sort of pushing young people into low-wage hourly jobs and that are probably not going to support them.*

Youth focus groups similarly highlighted frustration with facing narrowly prescribed employment support options that constrained their aspirations for more diverse and economically empowering educational and career paths:

> *[Programs say], "oh we have security license and we have CNA [Certified Nursing Assistant] license..." These are the same licenses that give you a minimum wage job. Like these will pay you minimum wage where I don't know why I'm going to sit through a three-week course, waste my time to get a license when I could just walk into Whole Foods and get a job that pays me minimum wage or better... I never had anything interesting offered or just other options and varieties.*

Youth expressed a desire for the City's systems and services to help them gain skills and access to jobs that pay more than minimum wage. They aspire to education and training that will open doors to having a career, not just a job.

Discussion

revealed that youth homelessness is gaining attention from City Government. This attention includes increased resources in some areas—especially for drop-in centers, shelters, and transitional and supportive housing programs. Yet the assessment also underscores critical opportunities to strengthen the system and the knowledge base to support system strengthening. In this section, we first discuss directions for research and data going forward and then opportunities for advancing the system's capacity to prevent and end youth homelessness.

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Directions for research and data

This rapid assessment sheds light on several opportunities for improving the evidence base going forward in support of an improved system-level response to preventing and ending youth homelessness in NYC. This section outlines key directions for research and data.

Include more perspectives. This was a rapid assessment that aimed to be as holistic as possible in a short amount of time but nonetheless pragmatically omitted several stakeholder groups that could offer important perspectives into what it would take the system to prevent and end youth homelessness. Examples of perspectives that could offer important insights in a more in-depth assessment include the following:

- Affordable housing and private housing stakeholders and experts (an in-depth housing market analysis centered on the housing needs and preferences of youth experiencing, or at-risk for, homelessness could be especially valuable).
- Post-secondary education stakeholders and experts, particularly representatives and advocates related to the City University of New York system.
- Employers and others involved in youth career development (an in-depth job market analysis centered on the housing needs and preferences of youth experiencing, or at-risk for, homelessness could be especially valuable).

- Analysis of the complex relationships between young people's interactions with behavioral health, justice, and child welfare systems and homelessness.
- Mental health professionals, to understand barriers and opportunities to extend access to youth experiencing homelessness.
- Philanthropy, to understand how non-governmental funders can support and complement City-efforts to end youth homelessness.

Convert a one-time system assessment to ongoing data collection and a functional database that supports dynamic service delivery. This rapid assessment provides a snapshot of the current system capacity and services available to address youth homelessness. The City could commit to regularized strengthening and updating of this information in order to track trends in the system capacity over time. This could also help to facilitate the development of resources that could significantly improve system-level practice. Examples include a dynamic map of services and supports available to youth within the system and an online platform to support coordinated care for young people from across public systems and service providers.

Develop and validate tools and processes for youth coordinated entry screening and assessment. The City lacks a youth-specific coordinated entry process. Recent research by Chapin Hall, University of Southern California, and Youth Collaboratory has shown that risk assessment tools for youth can help to prioritize limited housing resources (Morton, Rice, Blondin, Hsu, & Kull, 2018). These findings also underscored the need for broader, strengths-based assessment tools that are better suited for service planning (not just triage) and youth-level outcomes monitoring.

Identify and collect common and longitudinal outcomes data across the system, and integrate an equity focus. It is difficult to see how a system could fully excel in driving impact toward key outcomes unless those outcomes are clearly defined and measured across agencies and organizations that are part of the system. Further, it is

important to build processes and infrastructure to capture information on youth outcomes over time, particularly several months or even years after they have exited programs. For some outcomes, administrative data may be able to be leveraged for longitudinal tracking rather than relying exclusively on individual providers to do follow-up; this should be explored by the City. Collecting and analyzing data with respect to race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and gender identity to enable continuous quality improvement around equity.

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Advancing the system

This assessment draws on a wide range of perspectives, including from City Government officials, non-profit executives, frontline staff, advocates, and, most importantly, diverse youth with lived experience of homelessness. Two general points are clear:

- **First, this is a period of energy and attention around addressing youth homelessness with collective solutions in both NYC and the nation**. The momentum is palpable, and the City and its partners should leverage it.
- **Second, while the City has taken important early steps toward a more coordinated response, the current youth homelessness system involves a largely fragmented array of very limited programs and services**. At this stage, the concept of a "youth homelessness system" in NYC might be best described as aspirational given that most youth do not experience service delivery as a coherent system.

To bridge the gap between aspiration and achievement, we recommend the following steps for the City to explore. Each may require targeted research prior to implementation:

Prevention

- Examine opportunities to adapt Homebase outreach, access, and programming to further meet the unique prevention and diversion needs of youth, and collect and track data on how well Homebase services engage youth and address their needs.

- Integrate screening and early identification processes for identifying youth at-risk for homelessness in key public systems, such as behavioral health systems, child welfare, justice systems, and education systems, along with processes for coordinating timely supports and services.

Entry points

- Develop systems, processes, and common screening and assessment tools for youth-specific coordinated entry and ongoing coordination of care. Leverage technology and youth insights.
- Consider devising a public awareness campaign, co-designed with youth with lived experience, to mitigate stigma associated with youth homelessness and direct youth who need help to common entry points to access information and services.

Shelters, transitional housing, and temporary housing assistance

- Strengthen and evaluate youth housing program models that incorporate wraparound services, such as mental and physical health, education, and career support. Ensure existing residential programs have adequate resources and technical support to deliver or coordinate these services effectively.
- Develop a strategy for coordination, knowledge sharing, and smooth transitions between youth and family homelessness services in the city.
- Pilot and evaluate flexible, quickly deployable non-residential intervention options to complement the current set of shelters and residential programs in the city. Such intervention options might be particularly useful for youth who are more newly homeless and present less need or desire for intensive services through residential programs. Examples could include interagency case management, peer counseling, cash transfers, youth-specific rapid rehousing, and programs facilitating natural supports in the community, or combinations of these approaches.
- Make housing specialists who are sensitive to the unique situations of youth available to youth in shelters and transitional housing.

Stable housing

- Develop and evaluate follow-up (or "aftercare") service models for youth following exits from shelters or housing programs.
- Conduct a stocktaking of permanent and affordable housing resources available to youth—through public funding and the private market—and identify opportunities to increase the availability and accessibility of affordable housing for youth.
- Conduct a youth labor market assessment,[14] and identify opportunities to increase skills-to-labor-market matches and career development opportunities for youth experiencing, or at-risk for, homelessness.

Crosscutting issues

- Identify which City agency/office is responsible for coordinating a collaborative, interagency system response to youth homelessness, and ensure that it has the authority, support, and resources it needs to do so effectively.
- Extend and strengthen currently temporary mechanisms that support a coordinated response to youth homelessness, including a senior-level City official spearheading the coordination, a Youth Action Board, and a Youth Homelessness Taskforce or other collaborative body with diverse perspectives.
- Drawing on lived experience and data, develop a system-level theory of change for preventing and ending youth homelessness that centers youth outcomes, lived experience, and equity.[15] Use this to help develop a strategy for filling key gaps in the inventory of programs and services and a plan for analyzing and monitoring progress at the system level.
- Routinely assess and address equity in access to housing and wraparound supports and system outcomes based on race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and gender identity.
- Plan for enhancing and replicating this type of system assessment over time to track the evolution of the system, and periodically revisit opportunities for strengthening it.

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Conclusion

Building, enhancing, and maintaining a high-impact youth homelessness system is challenging and complex, but it is essential to preventing and ending youth homelessness. Especially given the critical developmental period of the life cycle in which youth homelessness occurs, the efforts and investments are worth it—not only for the young people, but also for NYC's prosperity, which hinges on their ability to thrive and contribute.

So now that I have my own little studio, I appreciate the heck out of that thing. Coming from, I know where I come from and like being homeless has like humbled me so much to just appreciate everything. Even if it's not exactly what you want, the fact that you have what somebody else on the other side of the world is praying for… You know to say that I'm in my early 20's, and I have my own place. It makes me feel good. It makes me feel like, you know, I'm independent.
– A youth who experienced homelessness in NYC

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14. *A youth labor market assessment examines the labor supply (labor market activity, occupational preferences, education and skills possessed), demand (employment opportunities, growth sectors, education and skills required, etc.), and conditions of work (quality, safety, hours, and earnings) in a given economy and examines and disaggregates data and trends specifically for youth (ILO, 2013). This kind of analysis allows for tailored and targeted economic policies and programs to promote gainful employment and economic opportunity among youth, particularly more marginalized populations.*

15. *A broader homelessness system assessment conducted by Future Laboratories for Seattle/King County also identified the lack of a system-level theory of change as a critical gap to the system's functioning and provided guidance for addressing this gap, which could similarly be useful for NYC. The online report can be accessed at: https://hrs.kc.future.com/actions.*

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Appendices

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Appendix 1. Service capacity tables

The following tables present information about the number of youth experiencing homelessness served by different types of programs in New York City. Table 1 presents a summary of combined findings, with some data coming directly from city agencies (CIDI, DSS & DYCD), and some coming from our survey of 21 community-based organizations. Tables 2, 3, and 4 present the data by each source.

Table 1. Overall summary of combined findings

Type of Program	Total Programs	Daily Youth Capacity	Youth Served, Daily	Youth Served Annually	Wait-list [a]	Annual Budget	Able to Bring Child; Partner; Pet (%)
Youth drop-in centers	8	No max	297	15,700	n/a	>$7,765,000 [b]	57%; 71%; 17%
Youth street outreach	4	-	99	17,526 [c]	n/a	>$550,000	N/A
Emergency/crisis shelters specifically for single youth (DYCD- and DHS-funded)	12	368	330	2,790	n/a	>$9,400,000	40%; 50%; 0%
Youth in single adult emergency/crisis shelters	101	Not youth-specific	831	3,509	n/a	-	50%; 50%; 0%
Emergency/crisis shelters specifically for youth with children	2	13	~13	Included above	n/a	>$2,280,000	100%; 50%; 0%
Youth with children in general family emergency/crisis shelters	199	Not youth-specific	2,631	5,875	n/a		
Emergency/crisis shelters for adult families	34	Not youth-specific	585	1,495	n/a	-	-
Transitional housing and/or maternity group homes	30	321	~321	837	47	>$19,061,311	57%; 33%; 0%
Transitional housing for survivors of domestic violence/ trafficking	53	Not youth-specific	-	851		$77,000,000 (not specific to youth)	-
Youth-specific transitional housing for survivors of domestic violence/ trafficking	1	3	3	6	0	$300,000	100%; 0%; 0%
Host homes	0	0	0	0	-	-	-
Rapid rehousing	1 [d]	115	115	60	100	$3,890,000	100%; 100%; 100%
DSS subsidized placements (rental/ housing assistance)	29	Not youth-specific	-	914	-	-	-
Permanent Supportive Housing [e]	6	400	400	400	-	>$2,725,000	50%; 20%; 0%

Note: This table combines results on the current capacity of different parts of the youth homelessness system from several data sources, using the best available data source for each statistic. The color shade of each cell indicates the data source used for the particular statistic. A legend for the colors is provided below the table.

Data Sources:

■ November 2018 survey of 21 community-based organizations

■ Reported by NYC Center for Innovation through Data Intelligence (CIDI) in December 2018. Annual numbers reflect those served 11/1/2017-10/31/2018. Ages calculated as of 10/31/2018. Active beds calculated on 11/6/2018. Daily served estimates are calculated as an average of 12 monthly point-in-time calculations. Under NY/NYIII there are 400 units PSH dedicated to young adults. Under NYC15/15 there will be 1236 units dedicated to young adults and 451 units dedicated to young adult families. Young adults can also access the other "adult" units.

■ FY 2018 Summary Data from the NYC Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD). Bed capacity as of June 30, 2018.

■ Sum of above CIDI DSS data and DYCD data

a. While some emergency/crisis shelters reported waitlists on the CBO Survey, these are not included here as they are more an indicator of preference than a lack of available beds, as NYC is required to serve all seeking shelter through the Right to Shelter policy.

b. Dollar amounts are preceded by ">" to indicate that there were some organizations with missing responses.

c. Includes duplicates.

d. This federally-funded program recently expanded, which is why the number served in the last year is less than the daily capacity. A second organization indicated they would begin to offer rapid rehousing services in 2019.

e. In December 2018, CIDI reported "under NY/NYIII there are 400 units permanent supportive housing units dedicated to young adults. Under NYC15/15 there will be 1,236 units dedicated to young adults and 451 units dedicated to young adult families. Young adults can also access the other "adult" units."

Table 2. Summary of Findings from survey of community based organizations

Type of Program	Specific Population	# of Orgs (n)	Total # of Programs	Daily Capacity	Serving, Daily	Serving, Annually	# on Waitlist	Annual Budget	Able to Bring Child; Partner; Pet (%)
Drop-In centers	Youth	7	8 centers	No max	297	8,824	n/a	>$7,765,000	57%; 71%; 17%
Street outreach	Youth	4	16 workers	-	99	17,526	n/a	>$550,000	N/A
Shelters for youth/young adults	Youth	5	10 shelters	285	281	1,868	203	>$9,400,000	40%; 50%; 0%
	Single adults	2	9 shelters	125	175	1,200	100	missing	50%; 50%; 0%
	Families with children	2	3 shelters	204	154	175	-	>$2,280,000	100%; 50%; 0%
Transitional housing/maternity group homes	Youth	7	7 congregate	392	348	833	47	>$19,061,311	57%; 33%; 0%
Transitional housing	Domestic violence/ trafficking survivors	1	1 congregate	3	3	6	0	$300,000	100%; 0%; 0%
Host homes	Youth	0	0	-	-	-	-	-	-
Rapid rehousing/ time-limited rental assistance	Youth	1	1	115	-	60	100	$3,890,000	100%; 100%; 100%
Permanent supportive housing	Youth	6	3 congregate, 3 in units	270	n/a	285	-	>$2,725,000	50%; 20%; 0%

Data source: November 2018 survey of 21 community-based organizations.

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Table 3. Summary of findings from the NYC Department of Social Services (DSS)

Type of Program	Total Programs	Active Beds	Youth Serving, Daily	Individuals Serving, Annually	Families Serving, Annually	Youth Individuals Serving, Annually	Youth Families Serving, Annually
Youth drop-in centers	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Youth street outreach	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Youth shelters	3	145	107	523	-	523	-
Single adult shelters	101	16,611	831	45,660	-	3,509	-
Shelters for families with children	199	14,699	2,631	85,577	27,505	5,875	5,146
Shelters for adult families	34	2,277	585	8,723	4,252	1,495	992
Transitional housing and/or maternity group homes	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Transitional housing for survivors of domestic violence/ trafficking	53	~1,200	-	~6,000			825
Single adult time-limited subsidized placements	29	-	-	-		93	-
Single adult long-term subsidized placements	See above	-	-	-		67	-
Families with children time-limited subsidized placements			-	-	-	390	329
Families with children long-term subsidized placements			-	-	-	320	300
Adult families time-limited subsidized placements			-	-	-	28	21
Adult families long-term subsidized placements			-	-	-	16	10
Permanent supportive Housing		400					

Data source: Reported by NYC Center for Innovation through Data Intelligence (CIDI) in December 2018. Annual numbers reflect those served 11/1/2017-10/31/2018. Ages calculated as of 10/31/2018. Active beds calculated on 11/6/2018. Daily served estimates are calculated as an average of 12 monthly point-in-time calculations.

Notes: NYC DSS includes both DHS and HRA. There are duplicates across the single adult, family with children and adult family systems for emergency/crisis shelters. The unduplicated # of individuals served over this time period by emergency/crisis shelters was 136,584. Under NY/NYIII there are 400 units PSH dedicated to young adults. Under NYC15/15 there will be 1,236 units dedicated to young adults and 451 units dedicated to young adult families. Young adults can also access the other "adult" units.

Table 4. Summary of findings from the NYC Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD)

Type of Program	Total CBOs	Total Programs	Daily Capacity	Serving Daily	Serving Annually	Waitlist	Annual Budget	Child; Partner; Pet?
Youth drop-in centers	7	8 [f]	-	~ 5 new youth each day	15,700	n/a	$2,474,101	Children
Youth street outreach	1	2	-	25	12,446	n/a	$400,000	Children
Emergency/crisis shelters for single youth	5	9	223	~223	2,267	0	$9,357,231.00	No
Emergency/crisis shelters for young mothers with children	2	2	13	~13	Included above	0	Included above	5.5% of RHY crisis beds reserved for infants & children
Youth transitional housing/ maternity group homes	11	30	321	~321	837	0	$15,049,307.46	6.5% of beds reserved for infants & children
Transitional housing for survivors of domestic violence/ trafficking								
Host homes		The NYC Department of Youth & Community Development does not directly administer funding nor does the agency supervise programs in this area.						
Rapid rehousing/time-limited rental assistance								
Permanent supportive housing								

Data source: FY 2018 Summary Data from the NYC Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD). Bed capacity as of June 30, 2018.

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[f] *The 8th DYCD youth drop-in center is opening in 2019.*

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Appendix 2. 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.

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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