



# NYC Housing Brief

Office of the New York City Comptroller

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## Hidden Households

New York City is in the midst of a protracted housing emergency. The City's net estimated rental vacancy rate is the official statistic used to gauge a housing emergency, but there are other important variables that shed light on the state of our housing environment. Chief among these is crowding. Crowding is an established predictor of homelessness and a critical indicator of negative health, safety and economic household risk factors. The City's "hidden households", which contain nearly 1.5 million New Yorkers, are the topic of this report.

This report seeks to highlight crowding as a signifier of key social and economic conditions that may not otherwise be observable by City agencies through traditional means. The report examines crowding through two distinct lenses. First, we document changes in crowding trends over the course of nine years, using data from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS) public use microdata from 2005 – 2013. Next, we explore the circumstances of crowded households in New York City, relying primarily on ACS public use microdata from 2013, the Census Bureau's most current vintage.

Among the most notable crowding trends detailed in the report, we find that New York City's overall crowding rate, which includes rental and ownership housing units, rose to 8.8 percent in 2013, compared to 7.6 percent in 2005 – a proportional increase of 15.8 percent. The City's crowding rate is more than two and a half times the national crowding rate of 3.3 percent. The proportion of crowded dwelling units increased in all of the City's boroughs except Staten Island during this time period with increases of 28.1 percent in Brooklyn, 12.5 percent in Queens and 12.3 percent in the Bronx.

Severe crowding, defined as housing units with more than 1.5 persons per room, also increased substantially, surging by 44.8 percent from 2005 to 2013, with increases seen in every borough. Most notably, the proportion of studio apartments with three or more occupants rose by over 365 percent from 2005 to 2013. All told, 3.33 percent of all dwelling units in NYC were classified as severely crowded in 2013, compared to a national severe crowding rate of 0.99 percent.

The report also examines the social and economic circumstances of the City's crowded households in 2013. In 2013, there were over 272,000 crowded dwelling units in New York City, occupied by more than 1.46 million residents. Some 23.6 percent of crowded households reported household incomes in the City's bottom quartile, 18.5 percent of crowded households reporting household incomes in the City's top quartile and 5.2 percent of crowded households reporting incomes in the 90<sup>th</sup> percentile or higher. This suggests that crowding is not a phenomenon that is limited only to low-income households.

Nearly 70 percent of crowded dwellings in New York City are occupied by an immigrant head of household and over 45 percent of all residents living in crowded dwellings are foreign born. Furthermore, the vast majority of residents living in crowded housing units have a family relationship to the head of household and more than four out of five crowded households include at least one person under 18 years old.

In the concluding discussion, the report highlights public safety and public health concerns as well as the relationship between crowding and homelessness and recommends areas of focus for city policy makers as they work to reduce the rising crowding rates documented in this report.

## Introduction

The state of New York City's housing environment has been widely chronicled, continually yielding research, commentary and legislation devoted to issues such as affordability, housing production and property tax policy. Yet one topic that has largely avoided scrutiny is the crowding situation in the City's 3.4 million housing units, which housed nearly 1.5 million New Yorkers in 2013.

Crowded dwellings are linked to negative health consequences including the spread of infectious conditions and diseases, mental and psychological distress and other adverse health outcomes such as asthma.<sup>1</sup> In addition, children in crowded housing situations have been found to experience negative effects on academic achievement and increases in behavioral problems which can trigger problems that persist into adulthood.<sup>2</sup>

Crowding has also been linked to increased fire and safety hazards, sometimes due to illegally constructed room partitions that limit egress and impede the movement of firefighters in emergency situations. "Overcrowding" is listed as one of the thirty violation categories in the New York City Fire Code.

Historically, crowding has most often been observed among low-income populations, an unsurprising phenomenon given that affluent families don't usually choose to live in crowded situations. For a variety of cultural and economic reasons, crowding is often observed in immigrant households.

Crowding is also a common prelude to homelessness as it may reflect a fraying tie to the local housing market. One New York City study that focused on the predictors of homelessness found a positive relationship between crowding and entry into shelter.<sup>3</sup>

Crowding can thus be seen as an indicator of health, safety and economic risk factors that are not typically

observable directly. The purpose of this report is to highlight this frequently overlooked housing condition in order to foster a clearer understanding of its underpinnings.

## Defining Crowding

In 2007, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) commissioned a study to identify the most useful measures of crowded housing.<sup>4</sup> The two most common standards used to define and measure crowding are persons-per-room (PPR) and persons-per-bedroom (PPB).<sup>5</sup> In New York City, both standards are used by government agencies for varying purposes.

In its triennial Housing and Vacancy Survey (HVS), the New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) uses a PPR standard to measure crowding within the City's housing types. Dwelling units occupied by more than one person per room are defined by HPD as "crowded" and dwelling units occupied by more than one and a half persons per room are classified as "severely crowded".

Public housing authorities, including the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA), use the PPB standard to determine appropriate unit sizes for families receiving Section 8 Vouchers. According to HUD, which sets housing quality standards for Section 8 apartments nationwide, a dwelling unit should have at least one bedroom or living/sleeping room for every two persons.

New York City also distinguishes crowded housing situations using a square footage standard. According to New York City Administrative Code §27-2075: "Every person occupying an apartment in a class A or class B multiple dwelling or in a tenant-occupied apartment in a one- or two-family dwelling shall have a livable area of not less than eighty square feet. The maximum number of persons who may occupy any such apartment shall be determined by dividing the total livable floor area of the apartment by eighty square feet...The floor area of a

room thusly: "rooms include living rooms, dining rooms, kitchens, bedrooms, finished recreation rooms, enclosed porches suitable for year-round use, and lodger's rooms. Excluded are strip or pullman kitchens, bathrooms, open porches, balconies, halls or foyers, half-rooms, utility rooms, unfinished attics or basements, or other unfinished space used for storage. A partially divided room is a separate room only if there is a partition from floor to ceiling, but not if the partition consists solely of shelves or cabinets". The American Community Survey subject definitions define bedrooms as "rooms that would be listed as bedrooms if the house, apartment, or mobile home were on the market for sale or for rent".

<sup>1</sup> Krieger, J., Higgins, D. (2002) "Housing and Health: Time again for public health action". *American Journal of Public Health*.

<sup>2</sup> Solari, C., Mare, R. (2012) "Housing crowding effects on children's wellbeing". *Social Science Research*.

<sup>3</sup> Shinn, M. et al. (1998) "Predictors of Homelessness Among Families in New York City: From Shelter Request to Housing Stability". *American Journal of Public Health*.

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. Office of Policy Development and Research. (2007) "Measuring Overcrowding in Housing."

<sup>5</sup> The American Community Survey subject definitions define a



kitchen or kitchenette shall be included in measuring the total livable floor area of an apartment but the floor area for private halls, foyers, bathrooms or water closets shall be excluded.”

Four common household types are typically found in crowded housing situations – multigenerational households, subfamily households, secondary individual households and doubled-up households.

A **multigenerational household** is defined as one with more than two generations living under the same roof. A **sub-family household** contains the primary householder and that householder’s family plus one or more additional families consisting of at least one parent and at least one child or a couple with or without children. **Secondary individual households** contain unrelated tenants or roommates that live with a householder and that householder’s family, if applicable. Finally, a situation where a dwelling unit is shared by a householder and his/her family plus at least one sub-family or at least one secondary individual is referred to as a **doubled-up household**.

## A Brief Review of Recent HVS Findings

Analyses of the City’s crowding situation, along with profiles of those living in crowded households, are included in each HVS report. We briefly review recent HVS findings here to add context to the data presented later in this report.

The final 2014 HVS report, as well as a complete set of its accompanying microdata, has not been released as of the publication of this paper, thus limiting our ability to include the most recent HVS data in this analysis. However, HPD has published selected initial findings of the 2014 Housing and Vacancy Survey which can be compared against findings published in the 2011 HVS report in order to add some context to the findings presented later in this paper.

The preliminary 2014 report acknowledges the serious crowding situation in New York City and provides important new details on crowding rates in renter occupied units.

According to the 2014 preliminary HVS report, 12.2 percent of all renter units in New York City are crowded and 4.7 percent are severely crowded. These crowding rates represent modest increases from the 2011 HVS,

when renter occupied units registered crowding and severe crowding rates of 11.5 percent and 4.3 percent respectively. According to the 2011 HVS, 9.3 percent of all New York City households were crowded at that time and 3.3 percent were severely crowded.

The 2011 HVS report also contains considerable discussion focused on crowding in immigrant households, noting that “the crowding situation for immigrant households was extremely serious.” In 2011, the overall crowding rate for immigrant households was 16.9 percent, while 5.8 percent were severely crowded. In discussing crowding trends by racial groups, the report noted that the two racial groups with the highest crowding rates, non-Puerto Rican Hispanics (23.2%) and Asians (20.8%), include many recent immigrant households.

The 2011 HVS report also explored the composition of crowded households. Of adult households with minor children, 27.9 percent were in crowded living situations and 10.7 percent of households with a single adult and minor children were crowded. The 2011 HVS report emphasized that crowding most frequently occurs in large households. In 2011, crowding was observed in 55.0 percent of five-person households, 80.3 percent of six-person households and 91.4 percent of households with seven or more people.

## Methodology

This report measures crowding using the persons-per-room standard. We find the PPR standard to be the most reliable measure of crowding due to wide inconsistencies in how tenants and real estate professionals classify a “bedroom” in New York City. Due to constraints in the availability of reliable apartment square footage data, this report does not measure crowding using the square footage standard.

Drawing on microdata from the U.S. Census Bureau’s annual American Community Survey (ACS), this report examines crowding in New York City dwelling units in two parts. First, we examine the overall trend in the City’s crowded housing conditions from 2005 to 2013, highlighting notable changes by geography and by apartment size. ACS microdata from 2013 is then examined to describe the circumstances of New York City tenants that live in crowded housing situations. The data in this report is limited to dwellings of eight rooms or less.



The use of ACS microdata does present some limitations to our analysis. Most notably, this report does not segregate its findings by housing type – e.g. market rate, rent stabilized, public housing, etc. Thus, the findings presented in this report encompass all of the City’s housing types.

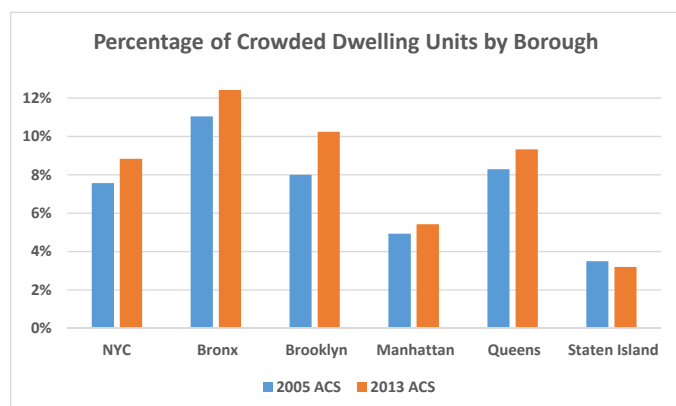
## PART I: CROWDING TRENDS, 2005 – 2013.

New York City’s overall crowding rate, which includes rental and ownership housing units, was 8.8 percent in 2013, compared to 7.6 percent in 2005, representing a 15.8 percent increase. The total number of crowded housing units grew from 228,925 in 2005 to 272,533 in 2013, an increase of 19 percent. The City’s overall crowding rate in 2013 was more than two and a half times the national crowding rate, which stood at 3.3 percent.

The largest proportion of crowded dwellings observed in New York City was in the Bronx, where 12.4 percent of all dwelling units were crowded in 2013, up from 11.1 percent in 2005. Brooklyn followed with its crowding rate jumping from 8.0 percent to 10.3 percent while Queens went from 8.3 percent to 9.3 percent. Manhattan and Staten Island both registered crowding rates below the citywide percentage.

Figure 1 contrasts changes in the percentage of crowded dwelling units in New York City and its boroughs in 2005 and 2013.

Figure 1 – Percentage of crowded dwelling units in NYC and its boroughs, 2005 and 2013



Source: NYC Comptroller’s Office from Census Bureau microdata.

### Borough Summary

Of the 3.4 million dwelling units citywide, a total of 272,533 are crowded and 102,791 are severely crowded.

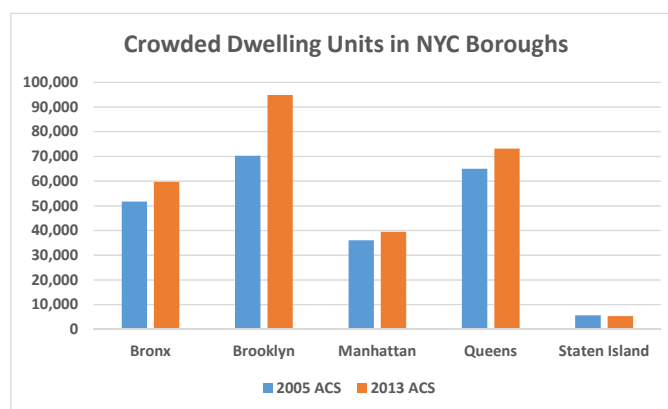
The number of crowded dwelling units observed from 2005 - 2013 increased in all of the City’s boroughs except Staten Island.

The largest crowding increases were found in Brooklyn, where the total number of crowded units grew from 70,323 in 2005 to 94,844 in 2013 – a 34.9 percent increase. From 2005 – 2013, Brooklyn was the borough with the largest number of crowded dwelling units.

The second highest crowding rates in the City were found in Queens. A 12.4 percent increase in crowding from 2005 – 2013 raised the crowded apartment total in Queens to over 73,000 units. The Bronx followed, with the addition of 7,972 crowded units – an increase of 15.4 percent. Crowding increases were more moderate in Manhattan, which added only 3,387 crowded units during the nine-year study period. Only Staten Island reported an overall decrease, shedding 342 crowded units from 2005 – 2013.

Figure 2 details the total number of crowded dwelling units reported in 2005 and 2013.

Figure 2 – Crowded dwelling units in NYC boroughs, 2005 and 2013



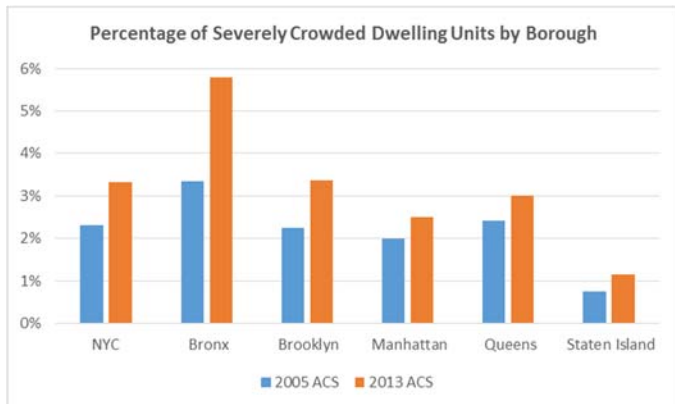
Source: NYC Comptroller’s Office from Census Bureau microdata.

### Severe Crowding

Perhaps the most astonishing changes to the City’s crowded housing situation from 2005 – 2013 were the observed increases in severe crowding. Incidence of severe crowding (dwellings with at least 1.5 persons per room) increased in every borough as illustrated in Figure 3.



Figure 3 – Percentage of severely crowded dwelling units in NYC and its boroughs, 2005 and 2013

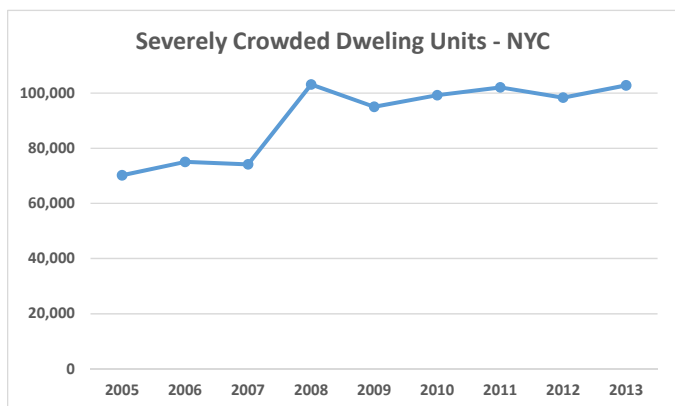


Source: NYC Comptroller's Office from Census Bureau microdata.

In 2005, the ACS observed 70,214 severely crowded dwelling units in New York City. By 2013, the number of severely crowded units had increased by 46.4 percent to 102,791 units. However, the 2013 severe crowding total represents a slight drop from a high of 103,111 severely crowded units observed in 2008.

Figure 4 outlines changes in severe crowding in New York City from 2005 – 2013.

Figure 4 – Severely crowded units in New York City, 2005 – 2013



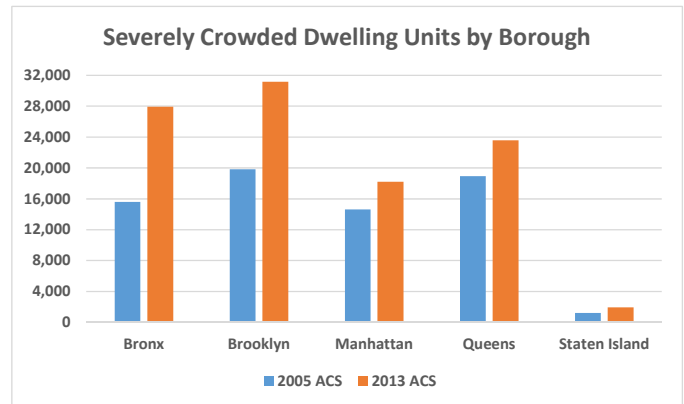
Source: NYC Comptroller's Office from Census Bureau microdata.

The number of severely crowded units increased in each borough. From 2005 – 2013, the rate of severe crowding rose by 78.7 percent in the Bronx, an increase of 12,297 severely crowded apartments. Brooklyn added 11,328 severely crowded units (a 57.1 percent increase), followed by Queens with 4,658 additional severely crowded units (a 24.6 percent increase). Severe crowding increased by 24.5 percent and 58.2 percent in Manhattan and Staten

Island respectively, although actual unit increases were relatively small in those boroughs.

Figure 5 contrasts changes in the number of severely crowded units reported in 2005 and 2013.

Figure 5 – Severely crowded dwelling units in NYC boroughs, 2005 and 2013.



Source: NYC Comptroller's Office from Census Bureau microdata.

As a result of these increases, the severe crowding rate increased by 44.8 percent with the overall proportion of severely crowding dwelling units jumping from 2.3 percent in 2005 to 3.33 percent in 2013. This compares with a national severe crowding rate of 0.99 percent as of 2013. Despite these seemingly low overall percentages, it is important to recognize that these are the households where the most serious health, developmental and stability problems are most likely to occur.

In 2013, the Bronx and Brooklyn were the only boroughs that exceeded the citywide severe crowding rate. Severe crowding was observed in 5.8 percent and 3.4 percent of those boroughs' dwelling units respectively.

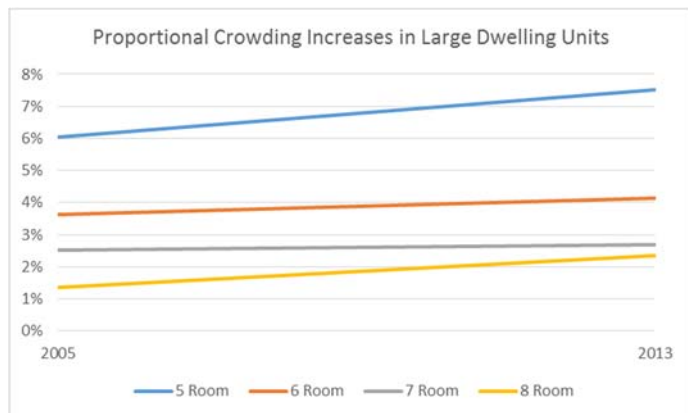
### Crowding increased in the City's largest and smallest dwelling units.

Crowded living conditions have been reported in a substantial number of the City's largest and smallest sized apartments.

Nearly 10,000 additional five-room units and over 2,380 additional six-room units became crowded from 2005 – 2013, accounting for a 29.6 percent increase. Crowding also increased in 7 room and 8 room dwelling units as illustrated in Figure 6. Apartments in Manhattan and the Bronx account for the bulk of the crowding increases in these large sized dwelling units.



Figure 6 – Proportional Crowding Increases in Large Dwelling Units, 2005 and 2013.



Source: NYC Comptroller's Office from Census Bureau microdata.

Citywide, the number of crowded one-room – or “studio” – units grew by nearly 34,000 units between 2005 and 2013, an increase of 185 percent. Suitably occupied studio apartments dropped from 85.4 percent in 2005 to 71.3 percent in 2013. Perhaps even more alarming, the proportion of studio apartments with three or more occupants rose by over 365 percent from 2005 to 2013, jumping from 2.9 percent of the City’s studio apartments in 2005 to 13.5 percent in 2013, as illustrated in figure 7.

Figure 7 – Changes in Studio Apartment Occupancy, 2005 and 2013

| Changes in Studio Apartment Occupancy, 2005 and 2013 |                |       |                |       |
|------------------------------------------------------|----------------|-------|----------------|-------|
|                                                      | 2005           |       | 2013           |       |
| Occupants                                            | # of Apts.     | %     | # of Apts.     | %     |
| 1                                                    | 107,192        | 85.4% | 130,044        | 71.3% |
| 2                                                    | 14,741         | 11.7% | 27,734         | 15.2% |
| >= 3                                                 | 3,614          | 2.9%  | 24,557         | 13.5% |
| <b>TOTAL</b>                                         | <b>125,547</b> |       | <b>182,335</b> |       |

Source: NYC Comptroller's Office from Census Bureau microdata.

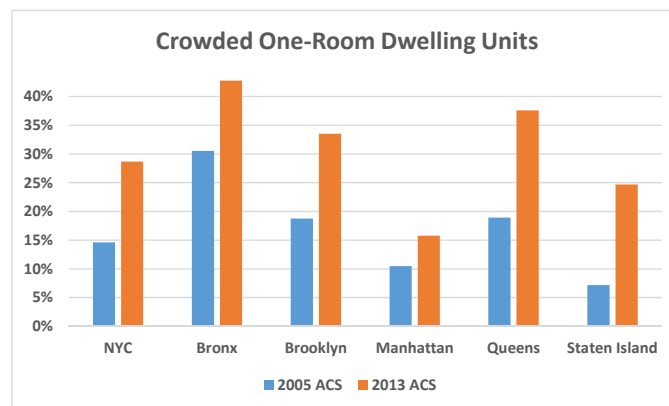
The number of crowded studio apartments increased in every borough from 2005 – 2013. The largest studio apartment crowding increases were in the Bronx, where crowded living conditions were reported in 12,615 additional studio apartments, a 443 percent surge. In Brooklyn, the addition of 9,857 crowded studio apartments resulted in a 229 percent increase, while Queens absorbed a 220 percent increase as a result of over 7,200 newly crowded units observed from 2005 – 2013. Manhattan and Staten Island also reported studio apartment increases with the addition of 3,790 and 468 crowded units respectively. These increases drove up the

citywide crowding rate in studio apartments from 14.6 percent to 28.7 percent.

Studio apartment crowding rates in the Bronx, Queens and Brooklyn all exceed the citywide percentage, with crowded studio apartments accounting for 42.8 percent, 37.6 percent and 33.5 percent of the one-room apartment stock respectively.

Figure 8 contrasts the proportion of crowded studio apartments in 2005 and 2013.

Figure 8 – Changes in the proportion of crowded one-room dwelling units by borough, 2005 and 2013.



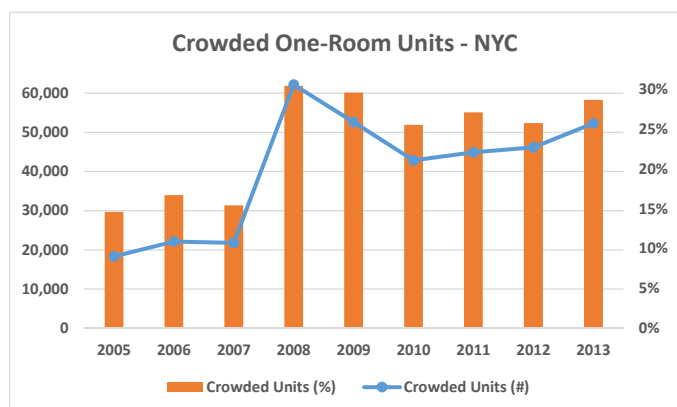
Source: NYC Comptroller's Office from Census Bureau microdata.

## Changes in 2008

The year 2008 saw an unusual surge in crowding, perhaps as a consequence of the historic recession that began the previous year. In particular, crowded living conditions increased from 21,801 studio apartments in 2007 to 62,168 units in 2008 – an uptick of over 185 percent in just one year. Since that time, the number of crowded studio apartments has decreased, however, crowded studio apartments in New York City still remain well above 2007 levels.



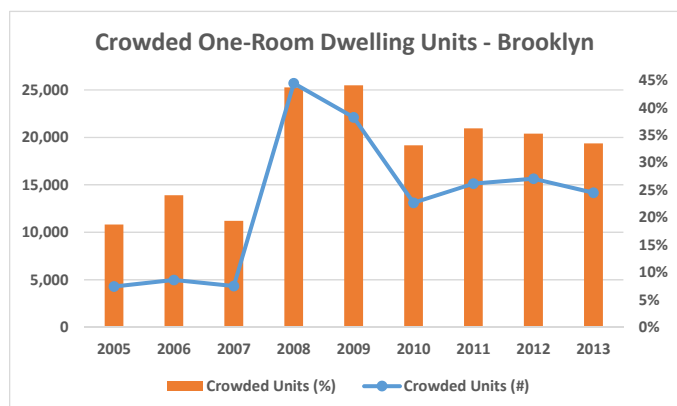
Figure 9 – Changes in crowded one-room dwelling units, 2005 – 2013



Source: NYC Comptroller's Office from Census Bureau microdata.

The increase in crowded studio apartments from 2007 to 2008 was largely driven by changes taking place in Brooklyn. Of the 40,367 additional studio apartments where crowded living conditions were reported during this time period, 21,333 of these units (52.8 percent) were in Brooklyn.

Figure 10 – Crowded one-room dwelling units in Brooklyn, 2005 – 2013



Source: NYC Comptroller's Office from Census Bureau microdata.

## PART II: CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE CITY'S CROWDED HOUSEHOLDS IN 2013

In 2013, it is estimated that there were 272,500 crowded dwelling units in New York City, occupied by 1,476,746 residents – a ratio of 5.42 persons per crowded household.

Crowding is overwhelmingly concentrated in the City's oldest buildings. About 43 percent of crowded dwelling units are found in buildings constructed in 1939 or earlier, and 78 percent of crowded dwelling units are found in buildings constructed before 1970. Conversely, only four

percent of crowded housing units are found in buildings constructed in 2005 or later.

Crowding in New York City is found most frequently in larger buildings. Roughly 50 percent of the City's crowded dwelling units can be found in buildings of twenty units or more, while buildings with two to four units hold 27 percent of the City's crowded dwelling units. Only 7.7 percent of crowded housing units are located in single family homes.

Crowding is most predominant among renters, with rental households accounting for over 82 percent of the City's crowded housing units. Of the 224,102 crowded renter households in New York City, the average contract rent was \$1,155. This compares to an average citywide contract rent of \$1,229 in 2013. The median contract rent for all apartments, and for crowded apartments, was \$1,100 in 2013.

Household income levels in crowded dwellings vary substantially among rental and ownership units. Owners of crowded housing units reported an average household income of \$121,560 and a median household income of \$91,000 in 2013. Among crowded renter households, the average household income was \$56,222 and the median household income was \$40,000 in 2013.

Of the crowded households that earned below New York City's median household income, 90.2 percent were renters and 7.3 percent were owners (the small percentage in the remainder occupy their dwellings without payment). Conversely, the breakdown of crowded households earning above the median is 72.5 percent renter and 25.4 percent owner.

An examination of income groups yields interesting results, with 23.6 percent of crowded households reporting household incomes in the City's bottom quartile, 18.5 percent of crowded households reporting household incomes in the City's top quartile and 5.2 percent of crowded households reporting incomes in the 90<sup>th</sup> percentile or higher. We see similar proportions in severely crowded households, with 24.9 percent in the City's bottom quartile, 16.4 percent in the City's upper quartile and 4.6 percent in the 90<sup>th</sup> percentile or higher. This suggests that crowding is not a phenomenon that is limited only to low-income households.



Among all working age residents in crowded dwellings, 55.5 percent are employed. Some 77 percent of this cohort works for a private sector employer and 6.6 percent are self-employed. A breakdown of the twenty-five most common professions for householders and residents living in crowded dwellings is detailed in Appendix 1.

Interestingly, the educational attainment of crowded householders versus crowded adult residents is generally similar. Crowded householders report earning undergraduate and postgraduate degrees at slightly higher proportions, while crowded adult residents report only marginally lesser educational attainment rates in most categories. Figure 11 details the educational attainment of crowded householders and residents.

Figure 11 – Educational Attainment of crowded householders and residents

| Educational Attainment     | Householders | Residents |
|----------------------------|--------------|-----------|
| No Schooling Completed     | 3.9%         | 5.0%      |
| Some Schooling             | 28.9%        | 28.6%     |
| High School Diploma or GED | 25.6%        | 27.9%     |
| Some College               | 13.5%        | 16.5%     |
| Associate's Degree         | 6.1%         | 5.4%      |
| Bachelor's Degree          | 14.8%        | 11.8%     |
| Master's Degree            | 5.4%         | 3.6%      |
| Professional Degree        | 1.3%         | 1.0%      |
| Doctorate Degree           | 0.5%         | 0.4%      |

Source: NYC Comptroller's Office from Census Bureau microdata.

Of all residents in crowded dwellings in 2013, 54 percent indicated that they received assistance from the federal government through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, commonly known as food stamps, and 17.9 percent indicated that they did not have private or public health insurance coverage.

Among all residents living in crowded dwellings, children under age 18 account for nearly 40 percent of the population. This compares to just over 21 percent of the citywide population that was under age 18 in 2013. As figure 12 illustrates, younger residents find themselves in crowded living conditions at a much higher rate than those in older age categories. Among all crowded residents, 58 percent are age 29 or below. However, this trend does not hold true for householders: 60 percent of householders in crowded dwellings are between the ages of 30 and 49. Adults aged 18 to 49 that live in crowded housing units are similarly proportioned to the City's

overall population, with 46.7 percent of crowded residents falling in that age range compared to 48.1 percent in that age range citywide.

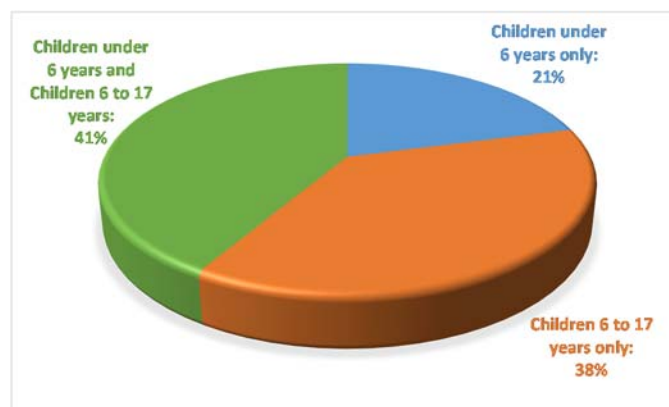
Figure 12 – Age distribution of residents and householders in crowded dwelling units

| Age             | All Residents |         | Householders |         |
|-----------------|---------------|---------|--------------|---------|
|                 | Frequency     | Percent | Frequency    | Percent |
| <b>Under 18</b> | 578,519       | 39.2%   | N/A          | N/A     |
| <b>18-29</b>    | 278,241       | 18.8%   | 31,655       | 11.6%   |
| <b>30-39</b>    | 230,723       | 15.6%   | 80,634       | 29.6%   |
| <b>40-49</b>    | 181,276       | 12.3%   | 83,285       | 30.6%   |
| <b>50-59</b>    | 107,085       | 7.3%    | 46,237       | 17.0%   |
| <b>60-69</b>    | 61,383        | 4.2%    | 21,200       | 7.8%    |
| <b>70+</b>      | 39,519        | 2.7%    | 9,522        | 3.5%    |

Source: NYC Comptroller's Office from Census Bureau microdata.

Children and adolescents are frequently found in the City's crowded dwellings. More than 81 percent of crowded households include at least one person under 18 years, a percentage that greatly exceeds the 30.6 percent of overall households in New York City with at least one child. In severely crowded dwellings, 68.8 percent included at least one person under 18 years old. Figure 13 details the age of children in the City's crowded dwellings.

Figure 13 – Age of children in crowded dwellings



Source: NYC Comptroller's Office from Census Bureau microdata.

A wide variety of family compositions are found within the City's crowded households. Multigenerational households accounted for 20.2 percent of all crowded dwellings and subfamilies were found in 19 percent. Grandparents living with children were observed in 13.7 percent of crowded housing units. Only a very small



percentage of the City's crowded dwellings, 0.4 percent, are headed by a grandparent with no parent present.

The percentage of persons age 60 and older that live in crowded housing situations increased from 14.5 percent in 2005 to 22.2 percent in 2013, a reflection of the City's aging population. However, older New Yorkers are actually under-represented in the City's crowded dwelling units, with at least one resident aged 60 years or older present in 22.2 percent of crowded dwelling units in 2013 compared to 34.7 percent in the City's overall households.

Surprisingly, only 11.6 percent of crowded dwellings are headed by a householder under age 30 and only 18.8 percent of residents in crowded dwellings fall within the 18-29 age range. In addition, only 6.5 percent of residents in crowded housing units are currently enrolled in a college or professional school. This suggests that young adults and college students, while still a significant population within crowded dwellings, are not the primary catalyst of crowded living conditions in New York City.

Young people that live in crowded housing units usually have family ties to the householder. Family ties are perhaps the most crucial social linkage in the City's crowded dwellings. Family members account for 95.4 percent of non-householders living in crowded ownership units, 90.8 percent in crowded renter units and 91.7 percent of all of New York City's crowded housing units. Among those residents that have no family relationship to the householders of the City's crowded dwellings, the vast majority were found in rental units.

Figure 14 breaks down the relationship of all residents in crowded New York City housing units.

**Figure 14 – Relationship of all residents in crowded New York City housing units**

| Relationship                  | Percent |
|-------------------------------|---------|
| Householder                   | 18.5%   |
| Husband or Wife               | 11.4%   |
| Biological Son or Daughter    | 41.5%   |
| Adopted Son or Daughter       | 0.4%    |
| Stepson or Stepdaughter       | 0.9%    |
| Brother or Sister             | 3.6%    |
| Father or Mother              | 3.2%    |
| Grandchild                    | 5.4%    |
| Parent-in-law                 | 0.7%    |
| Son-in-law or Daughter-in-law | 1.4%    |

|                       |      |
|-----------------------|------|
| Other relative        | 6.3% |
| Roomer or boarder     | 1.3% |
| Housemate or roommate | 1.6% |
| Unmarried partner     | 1.6% |
| Foster child          | 0.2% |
| Other nonrelative     | 2.0% |

Source: NYC Comptroller's Office from Census Bureau microdata.

Nearly 70 percent of crowded dwellings in New York City are occupied by a foreign born householder versus a 44 percent rate of foreign born householders in the City's overall housing stock. Within the cohort of foreign born householders in crowded housing units, 55.5 percent were born in Latin America and 28.2 percent were born in Asia. Over two-thirds of severely crowded households have a foreign born householder. Among all residents living in crowded dwellings, over 45 percent are foreign born versus 37 percent in the City's overall housing stock.

Language barriers may be a predictor of crowded housing. An inability to communicate in English can be a significant impediment to any person that seeks to participate in the local real estate market, thus limiting a potential tenants choices to housing options where the householder, building owner or real estate broker communicates in that potential tenant's language.

Some 32 percent of the City's crowded dwellings headed by a foreign born householder were classified by the U.S. Census Bureau as having "no one in the household 14 or over who speaks English only or speaks English 'very well'". This same language barrier was also found in six percent of crowded households where the householder was classified as native to the United States. A combined 24 percent of crowded households have "no one in the household 14 or older who speaks English only or speaks English 'very well'", versus 15 percent of all households citywide with this same characteristic.

In looking back to 2005 to identify changes in the circumstances of residents in crowded housing situations, many of the crowding variables detailed in this report are proportionally similar to 2013, a remarkable finding in and of itself.

Finally, real household incomes for all residents living in crowded housing situations increased by a slight 2.7 percent from \$67,239 in 2005 to \$69,035 in 2013 and real median rents in crowded rental units increased at a much steeper 12.8 percent, jumping from \$1,054 in 2005 to



\$1,189 in 2013. This suggests that the affordability of the City's rental housing stock may have played a role in boosting crowding.

## Concluding Discussion

The crowded living conditions documented in this report are both a consequence of decreased housing affordability in the five boroughs, and most likely an effect of the City's multiculturalism, as evidenced by the high proportions of immigrants and family members living in crowded situations. Crowding presents a number of intricate policy concerns for the City, some of which are discussed below, in addition to suggestions for further focus.

### *Public Safety and Crowding*

Fires are among the most detrimental conditions linked to crowded housing in New York City. High concentrations of people in enclosed dwellings can magnify the number of injuries and fatalities sustained during fires and illegally constructed walls and partitions have frequently been cited as a life threatening impediment to residents and first responders when fires break out in crowded apartments.

By nature of their illicit classification, the prevalence of illegal installations in crowded housing units cannot be measured using official data, leaving these conditions to be tracked using anecdotal means. However, media reports routinely detail the existence of illegal walls and partitions in crowded New York City apartments and dozens of residents and firefighters have perished in recent years as a consequence of these installations, suggesting that these conditions remain commonplace.<sup>6</sup>

Reporting illegally partitioned or dangerously overcrowded living conditions presents a quandary for residents who risk removal from their dwellings as a consequence. Yet avoiding proactive action to track and address these conditions courts future disaster. The city should convene a working group of housing, buildings and public safety experts to devise a workable strategy to proactively mitigate fire hazards that stem from crowding

while also minimizing the displacement of affected residents from permanent housing.

### *Public Health and Crowding*

The relationship between crowded dwellings and negative health consequences is known theoretically and has been demonstrated empirically on a national level. Crowded housing conditions acutely impact children, with spillover effects on academic achievement and classroom behavior.

As the City accelerates transitions from traditional school environments to holistic community school models, it will be important for principals and teachers to identify students that live in crowded living situations for additional health and academic support if when appropriate.

Additionally, the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene should consider increasing its data collection as it relates to residents living in crowded housing situations in order to improve the City's understanding of the public health consequences of crowding in a localized context.

### *Homelessness and Crowding*

With the City's official shelter census near an all-time high, the relationship between homelessness and crowding is a policy issue that cannot be ignored. In a November 2014 report on family homelessness published by the New York City Independent Budget Office (IBO), it was noted that from 2002 to 2006, crowding was the most common eligibility determination invoked by families entering the shelter system. However, IBO noted that families invoking crowding as a reason for homelessness steadily declined over the report's study period – where crowding was once responsible for 38 percent of shelter entries in 2002, it had dropped to just 11 percent of entries in 2012.<sup>7</sup>

The drop in crowding as a rationale for families entering the shelter system is an interesting phenomenon that does not comport with the 44.8 percent proportional increase in severe crowding as documented in this report

<sup>6</sup> The Citizens Housing Planning Council has tracked many examples of recent fire activity attributed to crowding and/or illegal occupancy on their website as part of their "Making Room" initiative: <http://chpcny.org/2010/02/fires-and-illegal-occupancy/>

<sup>7</sup> New York City Independent Budget Office. (2014) "The Rising Number of Homeless Families in NYC, 2002 – 2012: A Look at Why Families Were Granted Shelter, the Housing They Had Lived in & Where They Came From."



or the severe crowding increases noted in the IBO report.<sup>8</sup>

It may be that subtle changes in how the City classifies “crowding” vs. “eviction” as a rationale for entering the shelter system in recent years accounts for this disparity. It is also possible that there have been changes in the behavior of shelter applicants to characterize crowded situations that have become untenable as evictions in order to gain easier access to the shelter system.

In order to answer this question definitively, the New York City Department of Homeless Services should publicly release comprehensive data on applications, for all populations, seeking placement in City shelters so that policy makers can understand the extent to which crowding drives shelter applications.

*Report prepared by Stephen Corson, Senior Research Analyst*

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<sup>8</sup> The IBO report examined HVS data to document increases in severe crowding in the City’s rental housing stock from 2002 – 2011.



## Appendix 1

### The twenty-five most common professions for householders and residents living in crowded dwellings

| <b>HOUSEHOLDERS</b>                                                                                 |                  |          |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------|----------|
| <b>Occupation</b>                                                                                   | <b>Frequency</b> | <b>%</b> |
| NURSING, PSYCHIATRIC, AND HOME HEALTH AIDES                                                         | 11,876           | 5.13     |
| JANITORS AND BUILDING CLEANERS                                                                      | 11,379           | 4.92     |
| CONSTRUCTION LABORERS                                                                               | 9,230            | 3.99     |
| TAXI DRIVERS AND CHAUFFEURS                                                                         | 8,104            | 3.5      |
| CASHIERS                                                                                            | 6,644            | 2.87     |
| CHILDCARE WORKERS                                                                                   | 6,631            | 2.87     |
| COOKS                                                                                               | 6,593            | 2.85     |
| MAIDS AND HOUSEKEEPING CLEANERS                                                                     | 5,902            | 2.55     |
| WAITERS AND WAITRESSES                                                                              | 5,064            | 2.19     |
| RETAIL SALESPERSONS                                                                                 | 5,044            | 2.18     |
| DRIVER/SALES WORKERS AND TRUCK DRIVERS                                                              | 4,524            | 1.95     |
| FOOD PREPARATION WORKERS                                                                            | 4,264            | 1.84     |
| FIRST-LINE SUPERVISORS OF RETAIL SALES WORKERS                                                      | 3,789            | 1.64     |
| SECRETARIES AND ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANTS                                                           | 3,611            | 1.56     |
| ACCOUNTANTS AND AUDITORS                                                                            | 3,484            | 1.51     |
| PERSONAL CARE AIDES                                                                                 | 3,461            | 1.5      |
| REGISTERED NURSES                                                                                   | 3,361            | 1.45     |
| SECURITY GUARDS AND GAMING SURVEILLANCE OFFICERS                                                    | 3,268            | 1.41     |
| CHEFS AND HEAD COOKS                                                                                | 3,126            | 1.35     |
| CUSTOMER SERVICE REPRESENTATIVES                                                                    | 3,097            | 1.34     |
| SALES REPRESENTATIVES, WHOLESALE AND MANUFACTURING                                                  | 2,963            | 1.28     |
| LABORERS AND FREIGHT, STOCK, AND MATERIAL MOVERS, HAND                                              | 2,913            | 1.26     |
| MISCELLANEOUS MANAGERS, INCLUDING FUNERAL SERVICE MANAGERS AND POSTMASTERS AND MAIL SUPERINTENDENTS | 2,807            | 1.21     |
| ELEMENTARY AND MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS                                                               | 2,753            | 1.19     |
| TEACHER ASSISTANTS                                                                                  | 2,249            | 0.97     |
| PACKERS AND PACKAGERS, HAND                                                                         | 2,212            | 0.96     |
| RECEPTIONISTS AND INFORMATION CLERKS                                                                | 2,158            | 0.93     |
| PROPERTY, REAL ESTATE, AND COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION MANAGERS                                           | 2,144            | 0.93     |
| MISCELLANEOUS FOOD PREPARATION AND SERVING RELATED WORKERS                                          | 1,942            | 0.84     |
| STOCK CLERKS AND ORDER FILLERS                                                                      | 1,883            | 0.81     |



| <b>ALL CROWDED RESIDENTS</b>                                                                        |             |          |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|----------|
| <b>Occupation</b>                                                                                   | <b>Freq</b> | <b>%</b> |
| NURSING, PSYCHIATRIC, AND HOME HEALTH AIDES                                                         | 33,812      | 5.15     |
| JANITORS AND BUILDING CLEANERS                                                                      | 29,935      | 4.56     |
| CASHIERS                                                                                            | 29,801      | 4.54     |
| CONSTRUCTION LABORERS                                                                               | 21,486      | 3.27     |
| RETAIL SALESPERSONS                                                                                 | 19,583      | 2.98     |
| COOKS                                                                                               | 19,544      | 2.98     |
| UNEMPLOYED AND LAST WORKED 5 YEARS AGO OR EARLIER OR NEVER WORKED                                   | 19,523      | 2.97     |
| MAIDS AND HOUSEKEEPING CLEANERS                                                                     | 19,518      | 2.97     |
| CHILDCARE WORKERS                                                                                   | 17,269      | 2.63     |
| WAITERS AND WAITRESSES                                                                              | 16,519      | 2.52     |
| DRIVER/SALES WORKERS AND TRUCK DRIVERS                                                              | 15,621      | 2.38     |
| FOOD PREPARATION WORKERS                                                                            | 14,697      | 2.24     |
| TAXI DRIVERS AND CHAUFFEURS                                                                         | 13,142      | 2.0      |
| SECURITY GUARDS AND GAMING SURVEILLANCE OFFICERS                                                    | 10,822      | 1.65     |
| STOCK CLERKS AND ORDER FILLERS                                                                      | 10,680      | 1.63     |
| SECRETARIES AND ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANTS                                                           | 9,090       | 1.39     |
| CUSTOMER SERVICE REPRESENTATIVES                                                                    | 8,569       | 1.31     |
| PERSONAL CARE AIDES                                                                                 | 8,458       | 1.29     |
| ELEMENTARY AND MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS                                                               | 8,406       | 1.28     |
| CHEFS AND HEAD COOKS                                                                                | 8,131       | 1.24     |
| FIRST-LINE SUPERVISORS OF RETAIL SALES WORKERS                                                      | 7,580       | 1.15     |
| LABORERS AND FREIGHT, STOCK, AND MATERIAL MOVERS, HAND                                              | 6,698       | 1.02     |
| ACCOUNTANTS AND AUDITORS                                                                            | 6,592       | 1.0      |
| REGISTERED NURSES                                                                                   | 6,251       | 0.95     |
| MISCELLANEOUS PERSONAL APPEARANCE WORKERS                                                           | 6,051       | 0.92     |
| TEACHER ASSISTANTS                                                                                  | 5,965       | 0.91     |
| RECEPTIONISTS AND INFORMATION CLERKS                                                                | 5,965       | 0.91     |
| PAINTERS AND PAPERHANGERS                                                                           | 5,819       | 0.89     |
| CARPENTERS                                                                                          | 5,797       | 0.88     |
| MISCELLANEOUS MANAGERS, INCLUDING FUNERAL SERVICE MANAGERS AND POSTMASTERS AND MAIL SUPERINTENDENTS | 5,515       | 0.84     |
| SALES REPRESENTATIVES, WHOLESALE AND MANUFACTURING                                                  | 5,299       | 0.81     |



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