

December 2021 Report (reflecting July, August, and September of 2021)

Pursuant to Local Law 217 of 2017 to amend the administrative code of the city of New York, in relation to a record of the unsheltered homeless population, the Department of Homeless Services respectfully submits the report below.

In 2017, we announced our Turning the Tide (TtT) *on Homelessness in New York City* plan to transform the City's approach to providing shelter, by putting people and communities first. Our plan accomplishes this goal by ending decades-old stop-gap measures like the 21-year use of ineffective cluster shelter sites and the practice of renting commercial hotel rooms, which dates back, on and off, to the 1960s. Instead, through our plan, we are opening a smaller number of new borough-based shelters to help families and individuals stay connected to the anchors of life – such as schools, jobs, health care, families and houses of worship – as they get back on their feet.

With significant investments, over the past year, we have been implementing our transformation plan – while at the same time making sure in the short-term that we provide shelter each night to the families and individuals who turn to us for help as required by the right to shelter guaranteed in New York City.

DHS's transformative plan is built on four core pillars: preventing homelessness in the first place whenever we can; **bringing people in from the streets and subways 24/7**; rehousing people experiencing homelessness; and transforming the haphazard approach to providing shelter and services that has built up over the past four decades.

As we have testified previously, the average monthly census for DHS shelters increased 115 percent from 1994 into 2014 – rising from 23,868 men, women, and children in January 1994, to 31,009 in January 2002, and 50,869 on January 1, 2014. But after nearly four decades of an ever-increasing homeless population in NYC, the de Blasio administration has finally broken the trajectory of growth in homelessness; and, while we know we have more work to do, with the new programs, reforms, and investments we are implementing, we are headed in the right direction, holding the DHS census essentially flat year over year in 2017, 2018, and 2019 for the first time in a decade. Today, the NYC DHS census is approximately 46,000 – and without these initiatives, early projections indicated that the current DHS census would be in excess of 71,000, instead of where it is today, which is actually below the number of individuals in DHS shelter when Mayor de Blasio took office.

To that end, during the pandemic period, we have seen trends continue which preceded the pandemic, as the number of families with children residing in shelter had decreased significantly before the pandemic and continued decreasing more significantly during the pandemic, thanks to comprehensive strategies we developed and the extraordinary work staff have done and continue doing throughout this crisis to help families get back on their feet (homelessness prevention, rehousing and rental assistance programs); with the eviction moratorium (which built on our pre-pandemic progress driving down evictions by more than 40% through our first-in-the-nation right-to-counsel initiative) preventing additional families from needing to seek shelter, our staff and essential provider partners through their round-the-clock supportive efforts and successful strategies to relocate families to permanent housing have been able to drive down the census significantly.

As a result, the peak number of individuals across those families has declined by approximately 17,000 between 2014 and today, below 2012 levels.

At the same time, through the shelter transformation initiatives outlined above, we've already shrunk the NYCDHS shelter footprint by approximately 45 percent—already hitting our 2017 Turning the Tide plan goal—by closing more than 290 locations that do not meet our standards while siting a smaller number of borough-based shelters.

Addressing Unsheltered Homelessness – Bringing People Inside from the Streets and Subways

As indicated above, addressing unsheltered homelessness by bringing people in from the streets and subways and connecting them with the services they need to get back on their feet is one of the four core pillars of this Administration's work to address the citywide challenge of homelessness. To that end, this Administration has invested significantly in outreach programs, outreach providers, and outreach resources, dramatically expanding and intensifying this work over the past several years.

HOME-STAT: 24/7/365 Outreach

HOME-STAT (Homeless Outreach & Mobile Engagement Street Action Teams) encapsulates all of New York City's expanded and ongoing street homeless outreach efforts, from 24/7/365 in-field/on-streets outreach and engagement across the five boroughs, to case management, to dedicated facilities and tailored services – representing the most comprehensive outreach program in the nation. Through these efforts, City staff and experienced outreach teams from not-for-profit service providers canvass the five boroughs 24/7/365 as part of our citywide effort to identify and engage individuals who may be experiencing homelessness, encourage them to accept services, and ultimately help them transition off the streets.

At the same time, we have strengthened and expanded outreach programs citywide over the past several years, and continue to redouble our efforts. Between 2016 and 2019, we tripled the number of low-barrier beds dedicated to better serving our individuals experiencing unsheltered homelessness, increasing the citywide total from 600 beds in 2014 to more than 1800 as of December 2019.

In December 2019, we also announced our “Journey Home” action plan to double down on the progress we’ve made through HOME-STAT and help more New Yorkers experiencing unsheltered homelessness get back on their feet. Since the launch of “Journey Home” plan, we’ve done exactly that and more, especially as our City has responded to the unprecedented and unexpected COVID-19 pandemic aggressively and with urgency at a scale and speed never before seen, including: opening more than 1,300 specialized new beds in 2020 and 2021 dedicated to serving New Yorkers who have lived unsheltered, such as Safe Haven beds and stabilization beds, which we have established in commercial hotel settings, with hundreds more opening in the coming months and years.

Through these investments, programs, and enhanced efforts, including our more-than-tripling of the number of outreach staff canvassing the streets 24/7/365 from fewer than 200 staff in 2013 to more than 600 citywide, our City has helped more than 4,250 New Yorkers experiencing unsheltered homelessness come in off the streets and subways into transitional programs or permanent housing. This includes outreach teams’ positive progress engaging and helping unsheltered New Yorkers come off the subways through the enhanced, intensified subway outreach that NYC DHS implemented in response to the MTA’s shutdown of overnight subway service during the COVID-19 pandemic. Through this intensified subway outreach, outreach teams were deployed every night to end-of-line subway stations citywide to engage any unsheltered individuals who were utilizing the subways and departing the subways when they closed – on the subway trains, on the subway platforms, and outside of the subway stations. As a result, hundreds of individuals accepted referrals to shelter services and are in shelter now, rather than on the subways. (Clients interested in receiving services go through an abbreviated assessment and are transported to shelter services/placement. Throughout this outreach process, we are ensuring placements are expedited.) This intensive end-of-line work has continued even after 24-hour MTA service has resumed.

Creative Interventions: No One-Size-Fits-All

There is no one-size-fits-all approach to ending homelessness. With a dedicated not-for-profit provider for each borough (the Manhattan Outreach Consortium, led by CUCS working with Goddard Riverside and Breaking Ground, in Manhattan; Breaking Ground in Brooklyn and Queens; BronxWorks in the Bronx; and Project Hospitality on Staten Island; and Bowery Residents Committee (BRC) on the subways), HOME-STAT outreach teams work around the clock across the five boroughs by making regular contact with street homeless New Yorkers: getting to know them, developing trust, and sharing information about the resources available to them.

HOME-STAT outreach teams consist of multi-disciplinary teams working around the clock to seek out individuals living in public spaces, engage them about the resources and supports available to them, and link them to services with the goal of bringing them indoors, always focused on building relationships with individuals who over time have historically rejected services. Outreach teams are also focused on reaching, engaging, and assisting the most vulnerable of those living outside to ensure they are safe and/or not at risk of injury or death. This health-protection aspect of their role becomes heightened during

times of extreme weather and/or emergency circumstances, such as the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic. Outreach teams also perform crisis intervention assessments and work on housing placements through ongoing case management and supportive services, which includes connecting clients to medical benefits as they continue to work with these individuals throughout their journey back to permanency/stability. The outreach teams meet people “where they are” both literally and figuratively—whether that means conducting a psychiatric evaluation on a street corner or sending an outreach worker who can speak to a client in his or her native language.

With new collaborative approaches and creative interventions, we intend to achieve the breakthroughs and find the unique pathways off the streets that each of these individuals requires, in partnership with the dedicated, experienced outreach providers who’ve spent time getting to know them, building the trust and relationships that will ultimately change their lives.

HOME-STAT: Compassionate Individualized Engagement, and the By-Name List of Known and Prospective Clients

Central to the HOME-STAT effort, HOME-STAT outreach teams continue to build the City’s first-ever by-name list of individuals known to be experiencing homelessness and residing on the streets, more effectively enabling the teams to directly and repeatedly engage New Yorkers in need where they are, continually offering supports and case management resources while developing the trust and relationships that will ultimately encourage these individuals to accept services and transition off the streets. This tool allows outreach staff to update client and case information in real time, which may include the client’s first and last name, date of birth, race or ethnicity, the location where outreach staff engaged the unsheltered homeless person, including but not limited to, a bus shelter, drop-in center, hospital, park, safe haven, or subway, and information about the factors that may have contributed to their homelessness.

As part of that by-name list, HOME-STAT outreach teams now know and are actively engaged with approximately 2,000 individuals by name who are confirmed to be experiencing homelessness and living on the streets (“known” “by name”). HOME-STAT outreach teams are also continuing to engage another over 500 individuals encountered on the streets to evaluate their living situations, determine whether they are experiencing homelessness, and assess what specific supports they may need (“prospective clients”).

To this end, pursuant to Local Law 217 of 2017 to amend the administrative code of the city of New York, in relation to a record of the unsheltered homeless population, the Department of Homeless Services respectfully submits the report below.

HOME-STAT

Total number of New Yorkers who are—

- (1) known to HOME-STAT outreach teams; AND
- (2) confirmed to be experiencing unsheltered homelessness; AND
- (3) currently being engaged by HOME-STAT outreach teams; AND
- (4) included in the record, also known as the City’s ‘by-name list’ of street homeless individuals

—as of: September 30, 2021.

1,974

	Location of First Engagement	<u>Count</u>
Location of point of first engagement with HOME-STAT outreach teams, to the extent available, for those New Yorkers in the record referenced above—	Delayed Data Entry or No Entry*	319
	Bus Shelter	0
	Drop-In Center (DIC)	27
	Hospital	32
	Social service provider office	57
	Park	87
	Phone	62
	Playground	0
	Ferry Terminal	0
	Street	824

	Subway	533
	Other	33
	Grand Total	1,974**

*Delayed Data Entry or No Entry reflects cases wherein HOME-STAT outreach staff either (1) did not enter point of first engagement OR (2) entered data only after successfully helping an individual off the street and into dedicated transitional housing settings, which include Safe Havens, stabilization beds, or faith-based beds, all of which require referrals from HOME-STAT outreach teams.

** For the remaining clients, upon engagement, outreach teams determined they were in need of immediate connections to alternative support settings or care, including detox treatment and emergency medical assistance.