

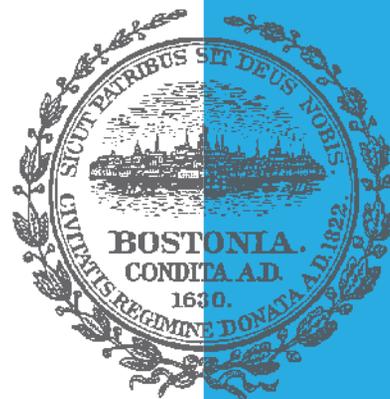


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**Beyond Shelter:  
Boston's Strategy  
to Reduce Homelessness  
June 2010**  
*A Leading the Way III Strategy*

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**City of Boston  
Thomas M. Menino  
Mayor**



*The City of Boston gratefully acknowledges the providers, advocates and staff member whose names you see listed here, as well as on the final pages of this document. The hard work and dedication of the Boston Regional Network to End Homelessness Leadership Council, the City of Boston Interagency Council on Housing and Homelessness, and the many Working Groups, have truly made this ambitious strategy possible.*

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June 2010



Dear Friends,

In March of 2009, I announced the creation of *Leading the Way III*, the City of Boston's new, comprehensive housing strategy which sets goals for housing production and preservation, building on the hard work accomplished by the first two *Leading the Way* policies. During the execution of both of these prior housing policies, a strong emphasis was placed on the creation of housing units specifically for the use of our homeless citizens. From the year 2000 to the end of 2009, we've slowly but surely increased the number of housing units that are set aside for the most vulnerable of our citizens, and piloted a number of initiatives designed to reduce, or to prevent homelessness.

None of these decisions were made within a vacuum; the City of Boston has always prided itself on its strong partnerships with Boston's exceptional community of housing advocates, and has long worked cooperatively with homelessness service providers who work every day to mitigate the devastating effects that homelessness has on individuals and families. Boston has a strong shelter system, and more than two decades worth of experience at not only counting our homeless populations through our annual census, but in trying to understand the root causes of this complex problem. When I convened my Housing Advisory Panel in 2008, I made it clear that I wanted to directly address homelessness as a large component of *Leading the Way III*, but that what I wanted to see was for the City of Boston to commit, not to sheltering our homeless, but to prevent them from becoming homeless at all by eliminating homelessness itself through a strategy that uses diversion, prevention, and intervention.

Boston's homelessness service provider community and advocates have once again risen to the challenge of helping us formulate a policy that we believe is realistic about the problems that we face as we try to eliminate homelessness, especially in light of the current economic circumstances. It also creates a blueprint of how that goal might be achieved. Within these pages, after a year's worth of meetings and conversations, you will find that outline. We recognize that this is a work-in-progress, and that we may have to adapt our plans as new information about Boston's homeless population and its challenges come to light. However, the downturn in the economy has sharply ratcheted up the number of homeless families seeking shelter; the rise in the numbers of homeless children, and the disruption in their lives and educations is no less troubling. We cannot - and will not - stand by and watch the situation devolve further. We are lucky that we have the support of both the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Boston's Regional Network to End Homelessness and all of the members of the Working Groups listed in these pages. It is going to take all of our combined efforts, talents and will to eliminate homelessness in Boston, but considering what it is at stake, we could do no less.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Thomas M. Menino". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "T" and "M".

Thomas M. Menino, Mayor  
City Of Boston

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# Beyond Shelter: Boston's Strategy to Reduce Homelessness Executive Summary

In March of 2009, the City of Boston announced its *Leading the Way III* policy, a comprehensive housing strategy to be enacted through 2012. One of the key goals of this new policy was an expanded commitment to homeless Bostonians, with a joint focus on total elimination of long-term individual homelessness, as well as a 50% reduction of family homelessness.

While that new policy outlined the basic elements of how Boston would achieve those goals, it did not specify details or resources, preferring to defer those decisions until the Boston Regional Network Leadership Council had finalized its recommendations in the summer of 2009. The incorporation of those recommendations into the goals already established by *Leading the Way III* are detailed in the document *Beyond Shelter: Boston's Strategy to Reduce Homelessness*, which is summarized below.

## HOMELESSNESS IN BOSTON: RECENT TRENDS

**Homeless Individuals.** While the number of homeless individuals has been relatively level at between 3,700–4,000 people for the last fifteen years, data analysis shows that at a point in time in 2009, approximately 15% of those individuals remained in Boston's shelter system for more than a year. Shelter stays of this duration were never planned for; the adult shelter system was designed to house people in short-term or emergency situations. This unintended use of the shelter system is extraordinarily cost-ineffective and ill-suited to solve the long-term housing needs of chronically homeless individuals. It also has a direct impact on the system's ability to provide services to all those in need; current estimates number 569 persons from Boston in this long-term category, and notes that they use nearly 50% of Boston's shelter bed time.

**Family Homelessness.** After having remained relatively unchanged since 1994, the rate of family homelessness began to show significant increases in 2005 and 2006. This trend continued through 2008, when Boston's annual homeless census documented homeless families as the majority homeless population for the first time, counting them at an historic high number of 3,870 people. There are a number of economic factors that have contributed to and complicated this worrisome rise: foreclosures, which have displaced nearly 4,000 households since 2007, and unemployment, with the loss of 19,000 jobs in Boston since 2008.

Predictably, the rise of homeless families was concomitant with the rise of homeless children. However, the rise in the number of homeless children has been particularly steep. In 1994, there were 1,414 children classified as homeless in Boston, and that number continued to decline to 1,181 by 2004. In 2004, homeless children represented slightly more than 20% of the homeless population. By 2009, the number of homeless children had risen to 2,380, a near doubling in just four years. More significantly, while the number of homeless children doubled, the proportion of them as members of the class of homeless families tripled to 60% between 2004–2009.

## BOSTON'S PROGRESS TO DATE

**1983–2003: Eliminating Street Homelessness.** Until 2003, the central tenet of Boston's homelessness strategy was to minimize street homelessness through provision of a robust emergency shelter system, and production of housing affordable for extremely low-income (ELI) persons, including the formerly homeless. Policies and initiatives to house the homeless during this period included: the creation of 1,000

new single-occupancy rooms; production of new supportive housing specifically targeted to the homeless; a homeless preference in allocation rent subsidies and public housing through the Boston Housing Authority (BHA); reclamation of 629 long-vacant public housing units of which 84% were occupied by the homeless; and a homeless set-aside policy for affordable rental housing development that required at least 10% of all new and preserved affordable rental units be made available to the homeless. The State's commitment to shelter every homeless family, even if that required temporary stays in hotel/motel rooms, has also been a critical part of the overall effort to minimize street homelessness.

Boston has been remarkably successful in achieving this goal. Presently, only 3.4% of Boston's homeless individuals are unsheltered. Nationally, the rate of unsheltered homeless individuals is 41.8%, or more than twelve times Boston's rate. Even more notable is the fact that there were no unsheltered families living on Boston's streets in 2008 or 2009, compared to the national rate of 27.2% of homeless families living on the streets during the same time period.

**2003-2009: Testing New Strategies to Reduce Homelessness.** The successful outcomes yielded by these innovations resulted in the City of Boston fundamentally rethinking its homelessness strategy. Beginning in 2003, the City's new goal became to end homelessness, whether the homeless person was on the street or in a shelter, and to prevent those at-risk for becoming homeless from entering into that state.

To achieve this new goal, Boston engaged in a number of pilot and demonstration programs. These programs placed homeless individuals directly from the streets into permanent supportive housing. The City also reprioritized federal funding toward permanent housing solutions for the chronically homeless. The number of homeless individual adults in more supportive living environments (e.g., transitional housing or recovery homes) as opposed to emergency shelter has almost doubled from 2002-2008. These efforts have contributed to significant declines in the number of adults in conventional emergency shelter: a 45% decrease from 2,394 in 2002 to 1,318 in 2009.

In addition, analysis from enacted homelessness prevention strategies, like the Homelessness Prevention Clearinghouse and a diversion demonstration project, showed that as many as 42% of families seeking shelter could be accommodated outside the shelter system.

## A NEW APPROACH TO ENDING HOMELESSNESS

When Mayor Thomas M. Menino introduced the concept of the *Leading the Way* comprehensive housing strategies in 2000, he made it clear that accomplishing the housing production goals and other established benchmarks was not intended to represent a finish line. Instead, achievement of these goals was meant to be a building block, a footing on which to base more expansive aims.

As stated in *Leading the Way III*, the City of Boston will no longer be satisfied with successfully managing the homelessness problem; it now intends to begin eliminating it. To achieve the twin goals of eliminating long-term individual homelessness and reducing family homelessness by at least 50%, the City will enact the five core strategies listed below:

**1. Prevention.** The first, and most important line of defense against homelessness is prevention. Analysis of prevention efforts in Boston has shown that it takes an average \$1,691 per client to help avert homelessness. By contrast, emergency shelter can cost an average of \$2,250 per month for hotel or motel placements. Beyond the cost savings,

however, prevention is the more humane alternative. To prevent homelessness, the City will enact, support or employ the following strategies:

- a. *An Early Warning System* to identify those at-risk of homelessness before their only option is the emergency shelter system;
- b. *A Homelessness Prevention Network* to deliver homelessness prevention/tenancy stabilization services to those in need;
- c. *Shelter Diversion Programs* to quickly stabilize or re-house people and keep them out of the emergency shelter system;
- d. *Rental Housing Market Stabilization Initiatives* to prevent unnecessary evictions resulting from the current state of the rental housing market. This effort may include such initiatives as regulating condominium conversions, reducing evictions resulting from foreclosures, preventing other evictions through tenant advocacy and legal representation, preventing the loss of affordable housing to abandonment, financial/physical distress, or to market rate conversion.

**2. Emergency Shelter.** For some households, prevention of homelessness may not be possible. In these cases, individuals may continue to rely on a well-run emergency shelter system for their interim housing needs. Until the time that expanded homeless prevention activities result in significant declines from the 5,000 people a year who seek entry into emergency shelter, the shelter network will continue to be an important part of Boston's response to homelessness. However, entry into the shelter system should be considered the first step in the process that leads a homeless client to permanent housing. Currently, some shelter providers offer substance abuse and mental health counseling and referrals, education and job training assistance, criminal justice re-entry services, as well as supportive services that aid a client in utilizing the offered programs. However, the City believes that these services should be made available to all shelter residents.

**3. Housing Placement Services.** Housing placement is the primary mechanism by which the City will help people exit homelessness. There are almost 50,000 units of assisted housing in Boston. While not all have the right types of subsidies to house those in extreme poverty, many do. In addition, the BHA issues about 800 mobile housing vouchers annually. These vouchers may be used by the homeless to access private market-rate housing stock, especially if appropriate support services for both the tenants and landlords can be linked. Connecting the homeless to these units as they become available at turnover could greatly increase the rate at which the homeless are placed out of the shelters. To aid in the effort to successfully arrange permanent housing, the City will enact, support or employ the following strategies:

- a. *Universal Housing Database* will identify all units potentially available to the homeless with real-time vacancy information;
- b. *A Rapid Re-housing Program* to quickly re-house those that have entered an emergency shelter but have few barriers to housing;
- c. *A System of Housing Placement* to effectively coordinate housing placement programs in order to appropriately match the homeless with available housing opportunities;
- d. *Reducing Barriers to Entry* for the homeless to gain access to the existing affordable housing supply.

**4. New Housing Production.** Boston has a long history of creating new affordable and supportive housing for its homeless; this new strategy does not alter that commitment. However, housing production goals may change as critical gaps in the housing system are identified and prioritized. For example, there may be a considerable number of homeless individuals or families currently in the shelter system for whom the housing supply, even with mobile support services, will not be workable. The production agenda for Boston will be determined by the identification of these key gaps in the supportive housing system. When identified, the City will find the developers and resources to produce new supportive housing to meet those needs. At the same time, continuing new production for ELI households will be needed to expand the long-term supply of units into which Boston's homeless can be placed.

**5. Sustainable Permanent Housing.** The success of the City's efforts to reduce homelessness over the longer term will require that all placements into permanent housing are sustainable, providing the kind of support services that aid clients in addressing the root problems that led to their homelessness. Without these services, some recently re-housed people will drift back toward homelessness, only to repeat the cycle. The City also recognizes that these services must reflect the diversity of issues that lead to homelessness: some clients will require workforce skill development and job placement; others may need medically-based support services; and still others will need services to gain access to the right income support programs. The City's efforts to end homelessness will include ensuring that appropriate support services are attached to as many homeless placements as possible, either as mobile client-linked services, or as development-based services.

## A PLAN TO IMPLEMENT THIS STRATEGY

Successful implementation of this strategy will require organizing all available resources in a manner that supports the five core components of the City's strategy. To be successful, each of these functions must be well coordinated with clear goals and benchmarks to show progress over time. This effort will also require collaboration and cooperation among agencies, State agencies, and providers. To facilitate this effort, working groups populated by a wide variety of stakeholders are currently operating in teams to implement these five core components. To ensure the successful implementation of this effort, the City will assume responsibility for two key services:

**1. Information Support.** When there is good information about the target population, much more effective strategies and better outcomes result. It will be the City's responsibility to collect and disseminate critical information that supports the effective delivery of the five strategies. This includes establishing and maintaining a centralized listing of all those at-risk for homelessness, further developing a universal shelter client tracking and reporting system that can be used to analyze the shelter populations, especially target populations such as long-term stayers, and creating and maintaining a real-time database of housing units available to the homeless.

**2. Advocacy & Resource Development.** It is important that the City, along with the service-provider and advocacy community, continue to work together ensure that homelessness remains a priority public issue and that sufficient resources to deliver this strategy are available. This will include an effort to promote new civic, business, and institutional involvement in the campaign to substantially reduce homelessness. Resource priorities for the City include restoring/increasing funding to the Rental Assistance for Families in Transition (RAFT) and the Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program (MRVP) programs in a manner that targets these resources to the homeless, developing a resource transition plan to ensure long-term sustainability for the homeless prevention and rapid re-housing services as the federal Homeless Prevention and Rapid Rehousing Program (HPRP) resources decline over the next three years, and identifying and correcting key elements of existing resources that impede their effectiveness for the homeless agenda.



## INTRODUCTION

In October 2000, Mayor Thomas M. Menino announced the implementation of the first of three comprehensive housing strategies that would be issued under the name *Leading the Way*. All three strategies shared similar goals: to alleviate the pressure put on the housing market by the housing bubble and the attendant sharp rise in sales and rental prices, by meeting the pent-up demand for new housing stock. To achieve these goals, the strategies adopted comparable objectives, primarily the production of new market-rate and affordable housing, and the preservation of existing affordable housing.

Over the course of the seven years that *Leading the Way I and II* were implemented, more than 18,000 new units of housing, including 5,000 affordable units, were built. In addition, nearly 9,500 units of affordable housing were preserved. This output represented nearly \$5 billion in investment of private and public sources of funding. This remarkable output was achieved by a cross-cabinet collaboration of several City of Boston agencies, including the Department of Neighborhood Development (DND), the Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA), the Boston Housing Authority (BHA) and the Inspectional Services Department (ISD); each Agency agreed to production goals and created the necessary strategies to achieve them.

With the success of these strategies in mind, and early indications of a changing economic landscape, Boston hosted a national conference in the spring of 2007, as it looked to create its next overarching housing policy. At *Boston 2012*, some of America's most accomplished housing leaders shared their perspectives and described innovative strategies. Those best practices were distilled for the consideration of the Mayor's Housing Advisory Panel convened by Mayor Menino in 2008. By that time, it had become apparent that Boston was not immune to the global housing market crisis. With the rise in foreclosures, and the building credit crisis negatively effecting lending, it was clear that a different approach to Boston's housing challenges would be required.

When the *Leading the Way III* policy was announced in March of 2009, it was an amalgamation of these best practices, innovative strategies, and the opinions of key stakeholders from Boston's for-profit and non-profit development and advocacy communities. *Leading the Way III* focused on four critical areas in Boston's housing market, and established goals and key strategies for: housing Boston's workforce; addressing the foreclosure crisis; reversing the rise in homelessness; and preserving and stabilizing Boston's rental housing market.

*Beyond Shelter: Boston's Strategy to Reduce Homelessness* directly addresses the third of these four key strategies, and its twin goals of eliminating long-term homelessness for Boston individuals and reducing Boston family homelessness by at least 50%. This report is based on the recommendations handed down by the Boston Regional Leadership Council in the summer of 2009, and is intended to provide a clearer vision of how these goals will be achieved.

## I. HOMELESSNESS IN FOCUS: 1983-2009

**1983–2003: Eliminating Street Homelessness.** In the 1980s, Boston's homelessness strategy was primarily focused on keeping people from living on the streets. In fact, the Emergency Shelter Commission was created in 1983 to ensure that there would be a bed and a meal for any homeless person who needed it. However, the City realized even then that affordable, permanent housing and support services was critical to eliminating street homelessness.

During this time, Boston was undergoing a real estate boom and the conversion of apartments and rooming houses into condominiums sharply depleted the housing opportunities for very low-income individuals. In response, the City launched the Thousand Rooms Campaign to preserve and create 1,000 lodging-house rooms in the '90s. Throughout that decade and beyond, the City also provided funding for new homeless and transitional housing developments through its Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) and HOME Investment Trust Fund (HOME) allocations from the federal government. Since 1997, DND has funded 28 predominantly homeless housing projects, creating 393 units of permanent and transitional housing for Boston's homeless. The City of Boston also created a Homeless Set-aside Policy, which required that all government-assisted rental housing projects establish a preference for the formerly homeless, setting aside at least 10% of the affordable rental units, per development. The City extended this policy to all larger affordable housing preservation projects that it finances. This policy has since been very successful in creating new homeless units quickly, without the siting difficulties that are often part and parcel of new developments. Since 1997, the Homeless Set-aside Policy has created units for the benefit of the formerly homeless in 88 developments, totalling 594 housing units that might not otherwise have included such housing.

At the same time, the BHA established a homeless preference in its federal public housing and rental assistance programs. This preference conveyed priority status for housing subsidies to the homeless, or those at greatest risk of becoming homeless, when it came to receiving housing subsidies. On average, 1,500 homeless families and individuals are housed through the BHA each year. In fact, this preference policy is responsible for housing more homeless people than any other activity the City undertakes. Despite these results, the BHA remains the only large Federal housing authority in Massachusetts that has this preference priority for the homeless.

Boston's largest and most successful homelessness prevention initiative of this period was never actually contextualized as such. In 1995 and 1996, there were 9,349 low-income, elderly and disabled households slated to lose their rent protections, making them vulnerable to staggering rent increases or displacement due to the end of rent control. Using strategies that are now standard homelessness prevention techniques such as emergency rent assistance and tenant landlord mediation, the City was able to successfully prevent an explosion in the numbers of homeless. In fact, between 1994 and 1997, homelessness declined slightly, while rent control was being phased out. Lessons learned from that effort -- creating a finite list of everyone at-risk, communicating with them well before the end date arrived, and the willingness to create solutions on a case-by-case basis -- would serve the City well in its efforts to expand its future homelessness prevention efforts.

Not all of the effects of the elimination of rent control in Massachusetts were so benign. In high-cost cities such as Los Angeles and Chicago, where some form of rent control still exists, privately-owned, unsubsidized stock still houses a number of very low-income people. In Boston, virtually all housing affordable to very low-income people must be government-assisted, which greatly constrains the City's capacity to provide affordable housing to everyone who needs it.

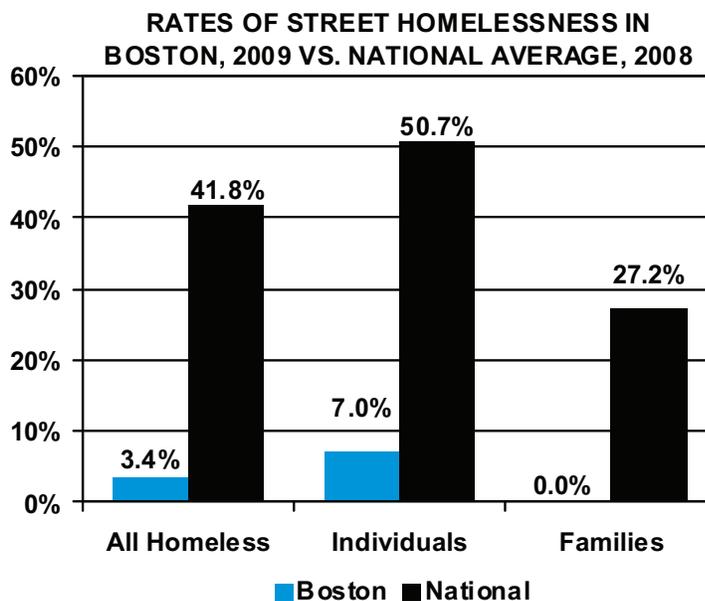
In 2000, under the auspices of *Leading The Way I (LTW I)* and its housing production and preservation targets, the City committed to reclaiming all of its vacant public housing units, thereby providing more permanent housing for the homeless. By 2003, due to the *LTW I* efforts, 629 long-vacant BHA units had been reclaimed. 84% of those units were occupied by formerly homeless people, or those most at-risk for becoming homeless.

In 2003, *Leading The Way II (LTW II)* was launched, and with it a new Single Person Occupancy (SPO) Initiative to produce housing suitable for homeless individuals. Harkening back to the Thousand Rooms Campaign of the 1990s, this SPO initiative represented an important evolution in this housing form. As Boston's experience with housing homeless individuals had grown, the diversity needs of the population it was trying to serve became more clear. Where the Thousand Rooms Campaign had maintained the traditional lodging-house structure of an almost group-living environment, the SPO Initiative would instead create a range of single-person housing options from fully-independent efficiency units up supportive group-living. To date, 243 new SPO units have been permitted with \$49 million in public and private investment. 153 of those units are targeted to homeless individuals.

**2003-2009: New Strategies to Reduce Homelessness.** For the 20 years from 1983-2003, the core of Boston's homelessness strategy had been to minimize street homelessness via utilization of a robust emergency shelter system, while moving people out of homelessness through the production of housing

affordable to extremely low-income households. The City has been remarkably successful in achieving that goal. Today, only 3.4% of Boston's homeless are unsheltered, and most of those are on the street not because of a lack of shelter, but for complex reasons such as mental illness, or fears for their security in the shelter. For comparison, this chart shows the national rate of unsheltered homelessness is 41.8%, or *more than twelve times Boston's rate*. Even more notably, there were no unsheltered families in Boston during 2009, due in large part to the State's commitment to shelter by any means possible including utilizing hotels/motel placements.

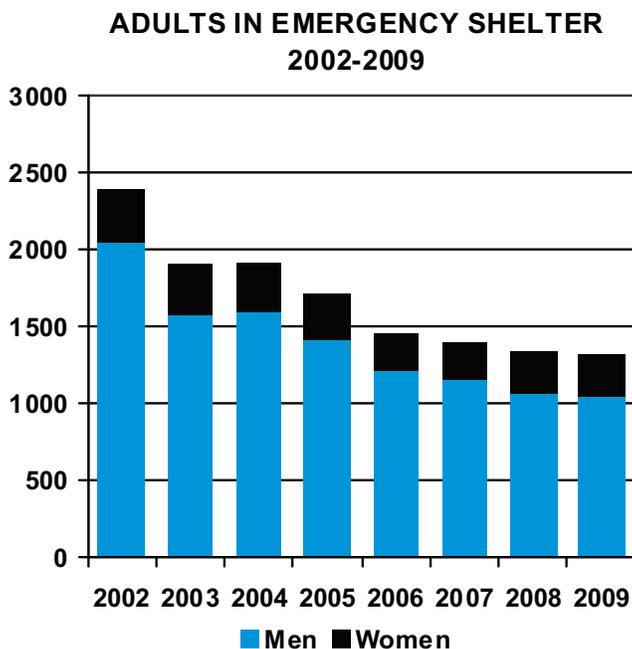
Nationally, an average of 27.2% of homeless families were on the streets.



With the goal of eliminating street homelessness, Boston's efforts and resources had been primarily directed at building a shelter system to the scale and capacity to meet the needs of those who became homeless. This effort had proved more successful for individuals needing shelter. Boston's family shelter network, which had always strained to accommodate the needs of this particular homeless population, had been considerably challenged by the recent rapid growth of family homelessness, which in turn drove more Boston families into emergency housing in hotel and motel rooms provided by the State.

Between 2003 and 2009, Boston engaged in a number of pilot and demonstration initiatives that expanded the strategy beyond this shelter and production paradigm. In 2003, the City began reprioritizing the use of its McKinney-Vento resources toward provision of permanent housing for its homeless. Boston's Continuum of Care agencies also initiated an aggressive effort to increase housing for and long-term placements of disabled, chronically homeless adults through a combination of intensive assessment, housing and treatment interventions, and targeted rental assistance. In addition, new permanent housing resources have been used to connect homeless adults to appropriate available rental housing by providing a subsidy linked with stabilization services. Since 2003, 351 new units for chronically homeless adults and long-term shelter stayers have been created through this initiative.

In 2006, with the support of Citizen's Bank, the City engaged in a pilot known as *Housing First*, a strategy directed at seniors living on the street. Under *Housing First*, outreach and housing workers would place these seniors directly into assisted housing, bypassing the shelter system entirely. When the population of seniors living on the streets was reduced by 63% in a single year, the City expanded the initiative. The following year, outreach workers and staff from the BHA went to public parks where homeless people were known to gather, and filled out housing applications with them. The BHA also provided priority placement status to the chronically homeless for all of its available single-room occupancy units. To date, these initiatives, broadly described as the *Boston Outreach To Housing Campaign*, have successfully housed 176 seniors.



In addition to these *Housing First* activities, there has been a considerable shift in how Boston accommodates its homeless individuals. More and more homeless single adults are in supportive facilities instead of traditional adult shelters. From 2002 until 2009, the number of individuals in supportive facilities such as detoxification, mental health, recovery or transitional homes increased from 1,038 in 2002 to 1,760 in 2009.

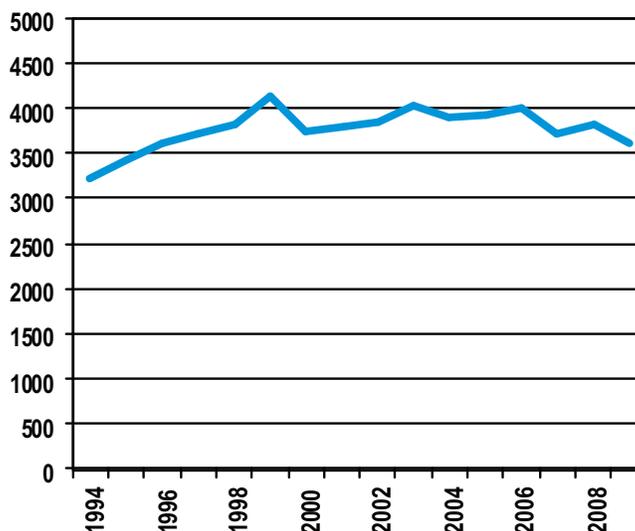
The net result of all these efforts has been a significant reduction in the demand for emergency shelter for single adults. As shown in this chart, Boston has moved from an adult shelter system operating at 126% of capacity on a nightly basis, or 2,394 annual residents, to a system with 1,335 residents that is operating at or near capacity and trending lower each year. While seasonal demand for winter overflow beds remains a concern, adult shelters have been able to absorb the reductions of 105 winter overflow beds, and the decommissioning of a 60-bed shelter for homeless men in Dorchester. Providers such as St. Francis House have also successfully converted transitional housing programs to new permanent supportive housing.

**Homelessness Prevention.** From 2003 until 2008, the City piloted a homelessness prevention clearinghouse initiative with the generous support of the Fireman Family Foundation. This initiative demonstrated how a more coordinated homelessness prevention system could be implemented, and provided a valuable base of knowledge, which in turn led to the development of the City's new Homelessness Prevention & Rapid Rehousing initiative. In 2008, a pilot diversion program was operated in conjunction with the Dudley Square office of the Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) and 9 other partner organizations. In this pilot, families seeking shelter from DTA were provided assistance in finding alternate housing solutions, rather than traditional emergency shelter. Sixty-nine families participated in the program, and 42% of them were able to be housed outside the shelter system. 86% of those diverted from shelter were still housed seven weeks later.

## II. HOMELESSNESS IN BOSTON: RECENT TRENDS

**Homeless Individuals.** Although the number of homeless individuals has been relatively stable at between 3,700 and 4,000 people for most of the last fifteen years, many individuals remain in Boston's shelter system for more than a year. In 2009, it was estimated that 560 of the 3,618 homeless individuals counted in Boston's Annual Homelessness Census met this criteria. The reasons for these long-term stays are often quite complex and represent serious barriers to permanent housing for these homeless individuals. They range from mental health issues to CORI obstacles, and may be compounded by the lack of appropriate supportive housing and transitional facilities. There may also be financial disincentives in the affordable housing system itself that may discourage leaving the shelter system.

**HOMELESS INDIVIDUALS IN BOSTON: 1994-2009**



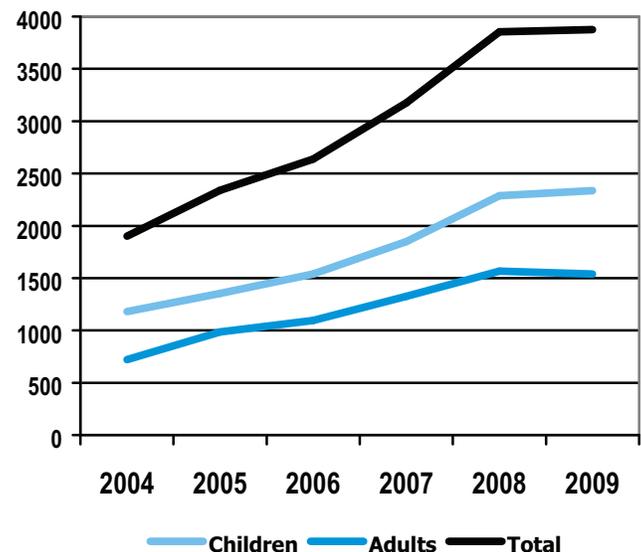
However, the emergency shelter system was never intended to house individuals for such long stays, or for individuals to use so many of the available resources. It is estimated that long-term stayers use approximately half of the day-bed capacity in Boston's shelter system. Clearly, moving these individuals more quickly into permanent housing would significantly reduce the need for overflow beds in the near term, and most likely result in a reduced need for emergency shelters in the long term. More importantly, as a statement of intent, Boston finds it unacceptable that some of its citizens are housed for such long periods in emergency shelter. Instead, the City has chosen to commit itself to finding other more appropriate housing and social service solutions for its long-term shelter stayers.

**Family Homelessness.** Boston has followed the national trend of rising family homelessness; after remaining relatively unchanged since 1994, those numbers began to increase significantly in 2005 and 2006. This trend continued through 2008, when Boston's Annual Homelessness Census documented homeless families as the majority homeless population for the first time ever. Although the number remained level from 2008 to 2009, this change in the face of homelessness is nonetheless disturbing, particularly due to the high rate of growth in the number of homeless children. In 2004, there were 1,181 homeless children in Boston, less than the 1,414 counted in 1994. By 2009, there were 2,336 homeless children – an almost doubling of that number in just five years. In fact, although homeless children represented just about 20% of the homeless population in 2004, they represented 60% of the growth in homelessness between 2004 and 2009.

There are a number of possible reasons why the number of homeless families has risen sharply. Some growth may be due to improved State eligibility standards, which enabled more families to participate in State-funded programs for the homeless in 2008 and 2009. Of course, the effects of the downturn in the economy have likely had a profound effect on the homeless counts. Home foreclosures have resulted in evictions of nearly 4,000 households since 2007; it is believed that more than 75% of those evicted were tenants. While very few of the homeless surveyed in 2009 indicated that foreclosure was the primary reason they lost their housing, it is unlikely that there has been no impact. In addition, Boston lost more than 19,000 jobs in the year between September 2008 and 2009. Just as with tenant displacement, it is unlikely that this massive job loss did not have had an effect on the numbers of homeless, as families and individuals began the cycle of exhausting their available resources and losing their housing situations before finding employment.

This confluence of events illustrates why there might be more homeless families than ever before, a total of 3,870 people in 2009. With economic conditions not improving as far as job statistics are concerned, it is possible that these numbers may rise even higher. Moreover, it is not just the number of families seeking services that has increased: a family's average stay in the shelter system has lengthened to 235 days, nearly a full school year. The emergency shelter system in Boston has always been hard-pressed to accommodate all of the families that need shelter, but this recent rise has so overloaded the system that the State has been forced to turn to hotels and motels for emergency shelter. In 2009, 28% of Boston's homeless families were sheltered outside the city, a significant increase over the 17% rate of 2006. However, it is also true that 31% of Boston's family shelter capacity is occupied by non-Bostonian families. If these non-Bostonians were not being housed in Boston, there would be 700 fewer families requiring shelter elsewhere, a nearly 50% reduction of the number of Bostonian families being sheltered outside the city in hotels and motels.

**FAMILY HOMELESSNESS IN BOSTON: 2004-2009**



With the wisdom gained from these demonstration and pilot initiatives, the City of Boston has decided to embark upon a new strategy to end homelessness. For 20 years, the central goal had been to minimize street homelessness by ensuring that there was enough shelter for those who needed it. Under the auspices of *Leading the Way III*, however, the new goal will be to reduce homelessness itself. In fact, the City has made a profound philosophical shift and will no longer be satisfied with successful management of homelessness. It now intends to begin eliminating it.

To achieve this aim, the City is implementing a comprehensive strategy to cover the entire spectrum of homelessness from prevention for those at-risk, to ensuring sustainability for those formerly homeless that have been housed. Through the combined efforts of the Boston Regional Network Leadership Council, the Boston Interagency Homeless Coordinating Committee and Regional Network Working Groups that focused on specific elements of the homelessness issue, the City has received a significant number of valuable recommendations for program and policy initiatives. This section encapsulates those recommendations into five key initiatives. While it is the City's intention to follow through on as many of these recommendations as possible, the City also recognizes that resource and operational constraints will require some phasing of initiatives while the City and its partners raise the needed resources to fully deliver on the all of the elements of this Plan.

**Homelessness Prevention.** Boston's experience with homelessness prevention over the past four years has shown that the between \$3,000-\$4,500 it takes to counsel an at-risk family and financially assist them to avert homelessness is not only substantially less than \$6,000 the average cost of a shelter bed for an individual per annum, but is also fraction of the \$33,600 per year cost to house a family in the state-run shelter system. Homelessness prevention, however, is much more than a financially sound policy. Homelessness prevention eliminates the suffering and indignity that comes from uprooting a family or individual and moving them into temporary shelter. It prevents medical problems from becoming even more serious, as often occurs when people are separated from their support networks and care providers, and prevents children from falling behind in school or missing it altogether when they are forced to move from one district to another. The City will expand its homelessness prevention capacities with the goal of ensuring that nobody enters the shelter system that could have held onto their existing housing, and will utilize the following four strategies.

**An Early Warning System.** An Early Warning System will be established among the entities that have the greatest interaction with those people most at-risk of becoming homeless in the near future. These entities include, but are not limited to: the courts (during the eviction process), subsidized housing providers, senior service organizations, Massachusetts Department of Social Services, Massachusetts Corrections Department, Community Health Centers, Massachusetts Department of Mental Health, Massachusetts Department of Children and Families, and the Boston Public Schools. During the current economic crisis, Massachusetts' One-Stop Career Centers will also be critical in identifying unemployed individuals who could be beginning down the path toward homelessness. The City will establish, develop and implement cooperation agreements and systemic strategies with these entities, including discharge planning and housing placement assistance with appropriate supportive services.

**The Homelessness Prevention Network.** An effective homelessness prevention network must have several attributes. It must be easy to access, either directly by the client or through referrals from the Early Warning Network. It must also be agile enough to respond to a diverse set of client needs. Finally, it must also be accountable for its results, with outcomes that are uniformly tracked and reported.

To accomplish making this network accessible, the City is collaborating with the State's Department of Housing and Community Development/Department of Transitional Assistance (DHCD/DTA) to create a universal Homelessness Prevention Intake Network that will be utilized by both community-based organizations and the City. This Network will use a uniform set of assessment tools and will accept referrals from the Early Warning Network as well as from other entities with the goal of matching clients to a community-based homelessness prevention provider that best suits their needs. Over time, the City would like to phase in a true universal benefits service to help clients access all of the benefits for which they may be qualified. Optimally, this system will, based on the interview with the client, and from information already collected from the client (e.g. DHCD/DTA intake interview information), automatically identify all of the benefits for which the client may be qualified by matching up the client characteristics with a computerized database of the eligibility requirements of the various public assistance programs. Ultimately, the system should be able to automatically generate completed application forms for all programs for which the client wishes to apply as well as a checklist of specific actions the client will need to take e.g., collecting pay stubs for submission to the appropriate government agency, to successfully file these completed applications. By connecting people with all the right benefits, it will be easier to stabilize people in their current housing, and to create a pathway from temporary rent subsidies to a more stable long-term housing situation.

The Homelessness Prevention Network will be a community-based network of homelessness prevention providers. The key building blocks of this network already exist in the various homeless prevention initiatives that were implemented by the Homelessness Prevention Clearinghouse demonstration project of 2003-2008. Further adjustments will be made by analyzing the profile of the newly-homeless to accurately reflect the current and underlying causes of homelessness. This expanded network will be both geographic and issue-based (e.g. entities to specialize in people with CORI issues, children aging out of the foster care system, vulnerable seniors, and persons with mental health issues). The Network will also need to have the capacity to serve multiple languages. Participating entities will be provided with the resources for case management staff, short-term rental assistance, legal assistance and funding for other provider-specific activities.

Accountability systems will be implemented to track client outcomes whether successful (housing stabilization) or not (entry into the shelter system). Data sharing agreements will be needed to accurately measure the outcomes of these efforts.

**Homelessness Diversion Initiatives.** Homelessness diversion is a relatively new strategy that showed great promise in the Dudley DHCD/DTA Demonstration Project where 42% of participating families were housed outside the shelter system. 86% of these families that were diverted from homelessness had not reentered the shelter system after seven weeks.

Scaling this pilot to a level where it will have a significant impact on the number of people entering shelter will require the City to identify the most significant entry points into the shelter system for both individuals and families, and to expand diversion programs in partnership with the State at those points where such strategies will be most effective. This is already underway with four new diversion programs funded by the City in partnership with the State DHCD/DTA and utilizing new federal HPRP resources. All of these programs are operating using standardized assessment tools to ensure consistency in services across providers. These new programs are also enacting recommendations as a result of the lessons learned via the Dudley Demonstration Project such as expanding the Early Warning System to include the Community Development Corporations (CDC) that operate subsidized housing, and providing one-year bridge subsidies to stabilize housing while clients develop job skills and increase their earning capacity.

The City expects, however, that establishing a diversion program for individuals will be considerably more challenging than the one currently underway for families. For that population of homeless people, there is no pilot effort that has been tested in Boston, and the situation is complex, with points of entry into the shelter system as numerous as the shelters themselves. Homeless individuals may also be more nomadic, entering several different shelters during the same timeframe. In addition, some data suggests that a population of homeless individuals are relatively short-term, remaining homeless for only a few days before they resolve their problems on their own.

For these reasons, the City recognizes that a diversion program for individuals cannot simply be created and scaled up based on the family homelessness model of the Dudley Diversion Project. The City is currently engaged in research, looking to best practices in other cities as a starting point. There have been "triage" programs in other communities in Greater Boston (Worcester, Quincy, Brockton) to help limit their shelter populations that may, with careful review, serve as a good starting point for developing diversion strategies for homeless individuals in Boston.

**Rental Housing Market Stabilization.** The City of Boston recognizes that there are larger forces at work in the rental housing market, and that the loss of affordable rental housing in particular can contribute to increased homelessness. During *LTW III*, the City plans to implement several initiatives designed to dovetail with its efforts to help reduce the number of homeless. These efforts are briefly summarized below, but a fuller explanation of the City's efforts may be found in the *LTW III* policy on the City of Boston's website, [www.cityofboston.gov](http://www.cityofboston.gov).

**Condominium Conversions.** Since the 1980s, conversions of existing rental housing into condominiums have steadily eroded the rental housing supply in Boston. In 2009, the Boston City Council approved an Order filed by Mayor Menino to extend the City's condominium conversion controls until the end of 2014, ensuring that conversions do not unfairly dislocate tenants without reasonable notification and accommodations. The City has also committed to restore small (2-4 unit) bank-foreclosed properties that it acquires from condominiums into traditional or mixed owner/rental housing.

**Foreclosures.** Over 75% of the people losing their homes because of foreclosure are renters. As part of its *LTW III* goals, the City has set a target of saving 1,000 homeowners from foreclosure by 2012, which could save as many as 1,000 tenancies. In addition, in October 2009, the City entered into an agreement with Bank of America

to preserve tenancies in properties foreclosed upon by the Bank, whereby the City purchases those properties and sells the properties to responsible new owners with the tenants in place. Several other lenders have already expressed interest in pursuing such an arrangement with the City.

**Tenancy Stabilization.** Through the Rental Housing Resource Center (RHRC), the City continues to prevent homelessness by assisting nearly 1,000 tenants per annum through mediation of tenant-landlord disputes, housing search assistance, placement services and referrals, and technical support to preserve tenancies. In addition, the legal services community and the Boston Housing Court have implemented the Tenancy Preservation Program to prevent unjust evictions, an effort which supplements services offered by HomeStart, ABCD and the Housing Court's Housing Specialist Department.

**Loss of Rental Housing to Abandonment.** Tight credit markets and declining property values, especially in high foreclosure areas, can lead to rising abandonment. The City is addressing this via direct acquisition of abandoned foreclosed properties, as well as using receivership to reclaim vacant and distressed properties. The City is utilizing Federal Neighborhood Stabilization Program funds to renovate these properties, in concert with \$150,000 from the Massachusetts Attorney General's Office to establish a Distressed Property Receivership Loan Fund.

**Other Loss of Affordable Rental Housing.** Under *LTW III*, the City has committed to preserve 5,000 units of at-risk private affordable housing, including at least 15% of the 5,583 units that are at-risk for market rate conversion by 2012. In November 2009, Governor Patrick signed into law an act that requires notifications to tenants whenever a change in affordability is planned, grants the right of first refusal to DHCD-approved developers so that they may match offers made by a third-party purchaser who does not plan to preserve affordability, and stabilizes rents for three years in developments that have terminated affordability but where tenants are ineligible for enhanced rental vouchers from HUD. In addition, \$150 million has been appropriated to the Community Economic Development Corporation (CEDAC) and the Massachusetts Housing Investment Corporation (MHIC) to establish an acquisition loan fund to support non-profit and for-profit purchases of this housing. Finally, the BHA has committed to preserve another 5,000 public housing units through renovation or redevelopment by 2012, and has acquired \$33 million of Federal Stimulus money to support this activity.

**Emergency Shelter.** There are some for whom homelessness prevention will not work, so the network of emergency shelters in Boston will continue to be an important part of systemic response to a housing crisis. Currently, nearly 5,000 people depend on this system for a place to live. Likewise, it is expected that gains from prevention and diversion activities will result in fewer hotel/motel placements, but Boston's family shelter system will likely remain at capacity for the near term. Beyond the immediacy of provisional housing, however, entry into the shelter system should be considered the first day of a process that prepares people to swiftly move from shelter into permanent housing with appropriate supportive services. Some shelters are already providing substance abuse, mental health, education, job training and criminal justice reentry services, as well as daycare and other accommodations to facilitate a move to permanent housing. Bringing services to those in shelters without them, especially those in scattered-site hotel and motel rooms, will present a significant challenge, but is one the City and State is collaborating with DHCD/DTA to address.

Some of the initiatives that are currently in discussion include:

- Development and implementation of a family shelter strategy with an emphasis of placement closer to the community of origin when possible, especially in the case of Boston's families;
- Synchronization of drop-in centers (especially for the street homeless) with the services of the Homelessness Prevention Network, enabling clients to better access the full range of benefits for which they may be qualified.

The City also recognizes the need to find ways to reduce existing disincentives that may unintentionally promote long-term stays in the shelters. For example, for some shelter residents moving from what is essentially free housing, to subsidized housing that will consume 30% of their very limited income, may not be optimal. Some may also seek to stay in shelter to maintain their Priority 1 Status for assisted housing. Policy shifts may have to occur so that the disincentives come from refusing an affordable unit, such as an SRO, when it is offered. In addition, the BHA is developing new policies to preserve priority status for the formerly homeless that are not currently in long-term housing arrangements. The City has also begun to explore alternative development financing models that will enable SRO operators to offer units with significantly lowered rent requirements for the tenants.

**Homeless Placement in Permanent Housing.** For those that do enter the shelter system, moving them into available permanent, affordable and appropriate housing is critical to achieving the City's goal of significantly reducing the shelter count. There are almost 50,000 units of assisted housing in Boston. While not all have the appropriate subsidies to house those in extreme poverty, many do. Connecting the homeless to these units as they become available could greatly increase the rate at which the homeless are placed out of the shelters. In addition, the BHA issues about 800 mobile housing vouchers each year that can be used by the homeless to access private market housing stock, especially if appropriate support services for both the tenants and landlords can be linked to these placements. Vouchers issued by the Metropolitan Boston Housing Partnership (MBHP) to Boston's homeless can further increase the capacity for the homeless to be permanently housed in private housing.



Housing placement is the primary mechanism by which the City will help people exit homelessness. It will seek to replace a currently fragmented system with a more universally-available and strategically operated system to place Boston's homeless into housing that is appropriate and affordable. There will be four primary components in this new system:

**Universal Housing Database.** Optimizing the rate of placement into affordable housing requires a well-maintained, real-time inventory of all housing options available at any given moment. DND's Information Services Unit will work with affordable housing providers including the BHA, owners of subsidized housing with project-based assistance, owners of subsidized housing with homeless set-aside requirements, and owners of unsubsidized units that are willing to accept homeless placements with tenant-based assistance to create a universal housing database. Organizations like CHAPA and MBHP that have already created subsidized housing inventories offer a good foundation on which to build, as well as the HousingWorks website that allows providers and individuals to search for available subsidized housing.

**Rapid Rehousing Program.** The City is now implementing a set of rapid rehousing tools, such as provision of the front-end cash needed to sign a lease, or job placement assistance to re-employ the recently unemployed. These are tools that will be used to help house those that can be quickly moved out of shelter and back into housing. Not

only does rapid rehousing typically ensure far less destabilization in the lives of homeless individuals and families, but there are much better long-term outcomes when compared with those homeless who have extended shelter stays. To deliver this program, the City is looking to organizations that have demonstrated experience in placing the homeless into permanent housing. This new effort



has been made possible through the new Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-housing Program (HPRP) funding received from the Federal government.

**Housing Placement Program.** Building from the existing base of shelter and service providers that already provide effective housing placement assistance, the City will create a housing placement network that will be located in public and non-profit shelters, health centers and other community-based organizations. Coordination with existing housing assistance programs such as the State's Housing Consumer Education Centers will ensure that services are complementary and not duplicative. To develop this network, the City must analyze its shelter population to ascertain that appropriate placement services are available to all segments of it, especially the more vulnerable populations of the elderly, mentally ill, youth transitioning from foster care and those affected by domestic violence. This network will be designed with the goal that each homeless person will have a housing placement service attached to them whether shelter-provided or not.

The City has already established a training and skill development program for all who are working in the housing placement network. A \$4 million demonstration of a bridge subsidy program linked to moderate-rent units was funded in 2009. This subsidy provides funds for families placed in those units while they await permanent

placements. However, significant additional resources will be needed for this program to reach the scale where it will have a meaningful impact on the number of families in hotels and motels.

Some of the additional tools under consideration to support this Housing Placement Program include using the systems developed in the Homelessness Prevention Network to ensure that every placement client has completed applications for all sources of income support and affordable housing assistance. This will require coordination and cooperation from all rental assistance providers to streamline their systems. However, the State's uniform housing intake form has created a reasonable starting point for this effort. Other tools under discussion are new systems to reduce the length of time that subsidized or otherwise assisted units remain vacant before they are turned over to new tenants. Shortening vacancy times will effectively increase the supply of affordable units and will also enhance the financial stability of housing providers.

**Reducing Barriers To Entry to The Affordable Housing Supply.** There are considerable barriers to entry for many of Boston's homeless that impede their ability to access existing housing units. Key barriers to be addressed are:

- Provision of mobile housing support services for homeless housing providers;
- Identification of screening practices that pose obstacles;
- Development of a more coordinated and consistent CORI review process across housing providers;
- Reduction of exclusions of households from housing for minor CORI issues;
- Provision of training to all housing providers on CORI issues;
- Continuance of work to ensure that temporary rent subsidies and placements do not effectively disqualify clients for more permanent rent subsidies;
- Development of mechanisms where collections of old debts owed to Housing Authorities are part of an agreement to re-house the tenant rather than a barrier that prohibits the tenant from entering assisted housing;
- Advocacy for, through policy directive or legislation, a regional requirement in all Public Housing Authorities and Rental Assistance providers in Greater Boston to adjust the existing priority systems for allocating housing assistance in a way that will substantially increase the participation rate for the homeless without unduly incenting people to become homeless as a shortcut to a rent subsidy.

**Production of New Housing for the Homeless.** Boston has had a long history of creating new affordable and supportive housing for its homeless, and this strategy will not alter that commitment. But its housing production agenda may change somewhat as the critical gaps in the housing system are identified and prioritized. Although the prevention, diversion and placement strategies have been created with an eye toward placing more of the homeless into existing housing, there will still be a significant number of homeless in need of a range of supportive services for whom placement into conventional affordable housing is ill-advised. However, in the short term, there may be very few openings in existing housing that have the right supportive services to house this population, resulting in placements in non-supported housing with disappointing results, or those persons remaining in the shelter system for extended periods.

Additionally, once gaps are identified, the City will need to acquire the developers and the resources to produce new supportive housing to meet those needs. As a starting measure, some of the priorities that have already been identified are:

- More permanent housing geared toward the most hard-to-house populations as an alternative to long-term stays in shelter. These programs should address the current financial disincentives to leave shelter;
- Creation of low barrier to entry transitional housing connected to intensive services and increasing demands on the residents that will enable them to move on to more conventional housing. These units may take the form of halfway houses or clean and sober houses;
- Creation of health-supported housing for populations with critical health needs, such as seniors, persons in recovery, and those discharged recently from medical institutions;
- Studying the feasibility of creating a rolling stock of temporary housing where long-term homeless can transition to permanent/appropriate housing;
- Streamlining of the current development funding process combined into a single application for all necessary resources, i.e., development funding, rental assistance and funding for support services;
- Establishing and implementing clear and consistent siting policies that reflect affirmative fair housing objectives, with the City providing support through the community review process;
- Provision of incentives to developers, to increase homeless set-aside units to more than 20%;
- Creation and implementation of a development financing mechanism for smaller (and easier to site) projects that does not depend on LIHTC funding. Where appropriate this can be connected but not limited to the NSP funding that the City is receiving for the redevelopment of foreclosed homes.

At the same time, production of housing for Extremely Low Income (ELI) households must be continued so that the long-term supply of units into which Boston's homeless may be placed is increased. The people working in the Placement Program will be better able to identify other gaps in the affordable/supportive housing supply.

**Stabilization of the Homeless in Permanent Housing.** The Housing First strategy that the City has begun implementing with this Plan acknowledges that placement into permanent housing alone will not reduce homelessness. The reasons that people become homeless are often quite complex, and if the issues that led to homelessness are not identified and addressed, can result in a cycle that includes homelessness. The success of the City's efforts to reduce homelessness will be measured by the sustainability of its placements into permanent housing. The same measure will be applied to those cases where homeless prevention services have enabled clients to retain their existing housing, or are engaged in successful diversion efforts. The City's efforts to end homelessness will recognize that reality by ensuring that appropriate support services are attached to homeless placements. The City also recognizes that these services must reflect the diversity of issues that lead to homelessness. For some it will be workforce skill development and job placement; for others it may be medically-based support services; and for those that are not likely to join the workforce, it may be services that help them gain access to the appropriate income support programs. Homelessness is not just a housing problem alone.

To achieve our sustainability goal, the City intends to support significant investments into the following housing stabilization services.

**Mobile Client-Linked Services.** These housing placement and prevention initiatives may result in a number of homeless being housed in conventional subsidized housing, which typically does not offer support services to help stabilize tenancies. However, mobile support services can be utilized to help prevent problems from developing, or to address problems swiftly as they arise. Understanding the needs of the client and linking them to the appropriate stabilization services must be integrated into any initiative that falls under this new policy. In fact, any new placements or averted evictions should include an assignment of support services that will



follow the client to their new home. The current 18-month limit on such services may prove to be inadequate, as some populations will require these services well past that timeframe.

**Development-Based Services.** There are homeless persons for whom mobile support services will not be enough to ensure a stable tenancy. For those clients, on-site and perhaps around-the-clock services may be needed. Without housing that provides such services, some homeless may be forced to remain in shelters where these services are available, or they may be placed in unsustainable housing situations. For these, often the hardest-to-house clients, the City will support developments that provide critical services on-site. This includes both existing developments and new developments where the costs of providing these services will be included in the development's adjusted operating budget.

**Workforce Development Assistance.** For many of the homeless, it is primarily economic forces that have caused them to lose their housing. Support services that include job training, skill development and job placement assistance will be key to the long-term sustainability of their housing. Developing closer linkages between the homeless and Career Centers and other job skill development programs will be an important focus for this effort. Programs like Project Place have already demonstrated very successfully the benefits of connecting workforce development investments with housing.

**Income Support Assistance.** Those not in the workforce (i.e., seniors or persons with disabilities) will require assistance in accessing all available income support programs will be very important. For example, program models such as PATH and SOAR have already demonstrated the effectiveness of quickly getting people onto SSI as a means of providing the income necessary to maintain stable housing.

**Medical Assistance.** For some, support services that help them manage or overcome chronic health or other medical issues will be critical to their ability to retain housing. The necessary services will vary based upon the clientele – some will require help with substance abuse issues, others will require medically-supported housing for chronic health management, and others may need supportive housing environments suitable for the elderly or those with disabilities.

**Services For People In Transition.** The necessary services will vary based upon the specific transition being made by the client. It is expected that there will be services required for persons reentering society from the criminal justice system or other institutionalized settings, for youth aging out of foster care as well as those in recovery.

A key role for the City will be establishing systems through which people working in homelessness prevention and placement can quickly gain access to the right stabilization services to meet a client's individual needs. This will require database management that can quickly match up client needs with service provider capacities. At the outset, the City recognizes that the need for stabilization services may well outstrip the capacity of providers to provide these services. The City also understands that raising the resources necessary to provide the level of support services necessary to meet the City's stabilization objectives will be a challenging task. These activities do not always fit neatly into the guidelines for many of the larger grant sources. However, the City also believes that when these activities are presented to resource holders as part of larger, well-conceived strategy to significantly reduce homelessness, new funding options will arise.

#### **IV. A PLAN TO IMPLEMENT THIS STRATEGY**

Successful implementation of this strategy will require organizing all available resources in a manner that supports the five core components of the City's strategy:

- Prevention of Homelessness Before It Starts**
- Emergency Shelter For All Who Need It**
- Placement of the Homeless into Appropriate and Affordable Permanent Housing**
- Production of New Housing For the Homeless**
- Stabilization of the Homeless in Permanent Housing**

To be successful, each of these five core functions must be well coordinated, with clear goals, and strategies that outline how each of these goals is to be achieved. These critical activities must also be provided with the right staff and resources necessary to achieve their goals and have benchmarks that show progress over time. This will require an even higher level of coordination of efforts from the various City agencies that have the needed staff and oversee the available resources. These agencies include the Boston Housing Authority, the Boston Public Health Commission, the Department of Neighborhood Development, the Boston Redevelopment Authority, The Office of Jobs & Community Services, the Emergency Shelter Commission and the Rental Housing Resource Center. Participation from other agencies such as the Boston Police and School Departments will also be needed for specific populations. The precedent for this coordination of effort has already been established with the City's interdepartmental committee that has helped coordinate the allocation of new resources and has guided the development of this plan.

Beyond the coordination of efforts within City government, there must also be a high level of sustained coordination between the City and the agencies and organizations that fund and deliver services to the homeless. This includes State agencies such as the Departments of Housing & Community Development, Corrections, Mental Health and of Labor & Workforce Development. Coordination and cooperation must also extend to the private philanthropic partners that not only provide valuable expertise from their experiences elsewhere but also control key resources that fill critical gaps left by public funding sources. Sustained cooperation with community-based service providers will also be critical to actually delivering the goal-driven agenda that this plan envisions. The groundwork for establishing these cooperative efforts has already been laid with the Boston Regional Network but there will be changes needed as the City moves from a planning and strategizing role to a goal-setting and implementation role.

These coordination efforts reflect the core principle of the City's implementation strategy. There are a large number of very good programs already in place with more being added as resources allow. Yet these programs are often not well coordinated into a comprehensive system that delivers the best possible results. The City believes that though strong cooperation and strategic coordination among providers and funders, better outcomes for all of Boston's homeless will be the result. The City also understands that responsibility for developing these cooperative relationships and strategic alliances fall to the City in its role as leader of the Boston's campaign to reduce homelessness.

Beyond organizing these goal-driven, results oriented, oversight and delivery teams, the City also acknowledges its responsibility to deliver two needed support services that will be key to success:

**Information Support.** Experience has shown that when there is good information about the target population, much more effective strategies and better outcomes result. It is the City's responsibility to collect and disseminate critical information that supports the effective delivery of the 5 strategies.

To do this, the City has identified four key initial goals for information support:

- Establish and maintain a centralized listing of all those at-risk of homelessness in conjunction with the [Early Warning Network](#), as well as tracking systems to follow the outcomes for people in the system;
- Develop a universal benefits data system that can be used by both the Homelessness Prevention Network and the Housing Placement Network to automatically match client profiles with benefit program requirements, including housing. Over time, this system will be enhanced, with the cooperation of the benefit providers, to automatically produce the relevant application forms needed to for the client to file for benefits;
- Establish, with the support of HMIS, a universal shelter client tracking and reporting system that can be used to analyze the shelter populations. This effort is already underway with the current effort to completely enumerate the count of all long-term shelter residents in conjunction with Boston's 2009 Homelessness Census. Implementation of the kind of benefit-card system currently used by Woods-Mullin may be the answer. Shelter-issued IDs must be scanned as the person accesses different services. Expanding the use to systemwide will obviate the need for repeated eligibility determinations as the client's relevant information will be accessible on a secure database.

This effort would also help track the more nomadic of the homeless and facilitate the BHA's efforts to house homeless priority clients;

- Create and maintain the database of housing units available to the homeless that builds on and complements existing systems at CHAPA, MBHP and HousingWorks. This system will require an on-line network so that housing providers can immediately update the system for upcoming vacancies, existing vacancies and filled vacancies. Using the data from the Universal Benefits Data System, clients can be matched up quickly to available units for which they are eligible. Maintaining the system with current information will be a significant challenge, and incentives for compliance may need to be structured into subsidy contracts.

**Advocacy & Resource Development.** It will be important that the City, along with the service-provider and advocacy community, continue to work together ensure that homelessness remains a priority public issue. Although the street count is very low, and there are declining counts in adult shelter, homelessness, especially among families, remains a large and difficult problem that must be aggressively addressed. Moreover, as new strategies to reduce homelessness begin to deliver measurable results, it will be important to publicize accomplishments to encourage resource holders to support continued, and possibly increased, funding for programs that have proven successful.

Expanding the involvement of the citizenry of Boston will also be an important advocacy goal for the City. Boston can be proud of the continuing volunteerism and financial support that its residents have provided to its homeless over the years. The same commitment and enthusiasm that delivered those results can now be applied to the even more vital task of substantially reducing homelessness that this Plan envisions. Whether it is a landlord offering to take a homeless placement in their building, or an individual providing their expertise to help a family develop new job skills, this Plan will offer new avenues for civic involvement and philanthropic initiative. The City understands this and is confident that, given the right participation opportunity, that individual, business and institutional leaders of our city will again rise to the new challenge of helping eliminate homelessness in Boston.

Working cooperatively with other Regional Networks, especially the Metro Boston Regional Network will also be an important advocacy function for the City. Inter-regional coordination can promote a number of goals, including ensuring that initiatives in one region do not undercut initiatives in another region (e.g. diversion programs should not simply divert shelter applicants from one region to another), and promote greater continuity of services from one region to the next, as well as better coordination of resource development efforts so that regions are advocating for common resource and legislative goals with a more powerful combined voice.

Currently pending at the State House is "An Act To Prevent Homelessness By Removing Barriers to Subsidized Housing" that would remove some of the barriers to subsidized housing such as prohibiting overreliance on credit reports, retaining priority status for households with temporary subsidies, establishing a statewide priority for the homeless and those highly at-risk of homelessness in all State and Federally assisted developments in the Commonwealth. This is legislation that should be supported and passed.

This leads to a larger advocacy role for the City and its partners. The City recognizes that homelessness is much more than just a housing issue – the inability to secure housing is often an outcome from other root causes of family distress such as mental health, substance

abuse, domestic violence, economic dislocation and severe family disruptions (e.g. parents in correctional facilities). The more we understand about the root causes of homelessness, the better we will be able to fashion strategies to prevent homelessness from occurring. Working with the academic community and the most experienced providers in the field, Boston wants to provide greater support and leadership in developing a robust policy agenda that will first, identify and second, offer realistic actions to better address the root causes of homelessness.

The work of the Regional Network Working Groups have already identified several of these root causes of homelessness including, but not limited to:

- CORI issues that prevent access to housing;
- Youth services programs that release aging-out youth into shelters;
- Incompatibility of medical insurance practices with the need for needed case management and supportive services;
- Department of Corrections (DOC) practices on release of prisoners;
- Restrictive sex-offender placement policies that force people into shelters;
- Undocumented residents.

Documented analysis of the root causes of homelessness in Boston can lead toward even better strategies that get at the underlying reasons for homelessness. That may ultimately lead to a new homeless advocacy agenda that may have much less to do with housing.

**Resource Development.** The establishment of the Boston Regional Network has created unprecedented cooperation and common-purpose strategizing about how programs and resources should be deployed with all resource holders in the region. This is something that the City is firmly committed to maintaining for the foreseeable future. The City will work with all resource providers to identify resource strategies that will optimize the outcomes for Boston's homeless. Some of the resource priorities for the City will be:

- Work with City and State leaders and the homeless advocacy community to restore/increase funding to the RAFT and MRVP programs in a manner that most targets resources to the homeless, particularly those in hotel/motels;
- Develop a resource transition plan for homeless prevention and rapid rehousing services as HPRP resources decline over the next three years;
- Identify and correct practices that impede effectiveness on the homeless agenda, e.g., policies that encourage families to enter shelter rather than participate in diversion programs;
- Identify resources to fund new program initiatives, such as a proposed low-barrier-to-entry rental assistance fund for housing the long term homeless;
- Develop a resource strategy for the Stabilization component of the Strategy;
- Develop a shared resource agenda with all of the resource holders so that resource decisions are coordinated in a way to optimize the overall impact of the combined investments;
- Sustain, and seek to increase, the resources allocated to the strategies for the chronically homeless that have successfully reduced the number of adults in emergency shelter over the past six years;
- Find resources to fund a bridge subsidy tool and identify a supply of moderate rent units where families can be placed while they wait for permanent subsidies/units to become available;
- Consider initially targeting to hotel/motel families where the maximum cost savings and the maximum family stabilization benefits can be realized.

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