

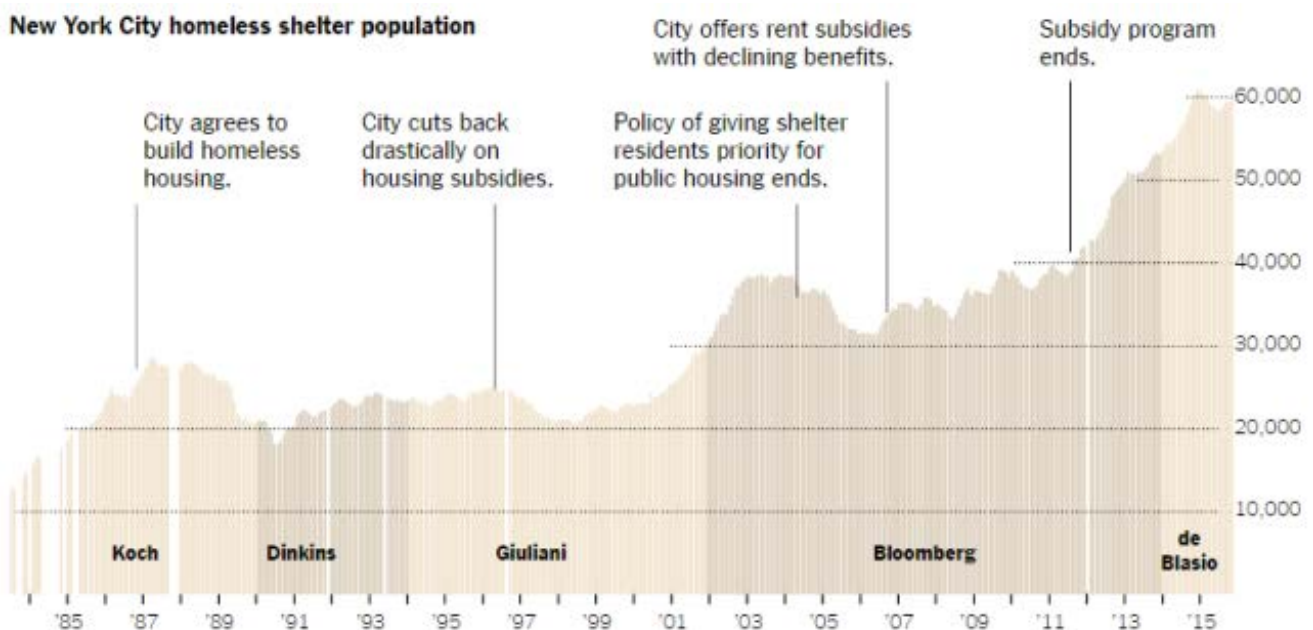
Keep the “Homeless” at Home

John M. Reilly, with contributions from UNHP staff

“[Turning the Tide on Homelessness](#)” is Mayor de Blasio’s attempt to hit the “restart” button to address the spiraling crisis of homelessness in New York. The headlines focused on the [90 new shelters](#) that will be created as part of the Mayor’s plan and on keeping the homeless in their neighborhoods.

But there was a [second story in the news](#) that day that spoke of an event that might ultimately do more to reduce the number of people entering the city’s homeless system in the first place. The [Legal Aid Society](#) and a pro-bono partner announced a court settlement that will result in an increase in the amount low-income families in New York City can receive to subsidize their rent payment. A family of three facing eviction will be eligible to receive a rent supplement of up to \$1,515 to rent a two-bedroom apartment. The current limit for the Family Eviction Prevention Supplement (FEPS) is only \$850 for a family of three, a cap that has remained unchanged since 2004, despite an 18% increase in rents between 2005 and 2015. FEPS no longer covers most monthly rent charges, leaving more and more families unable to keep up with the rent and facing risk of eviction in Housing Court.

A snapshot of the homeless crisis makes for a catchy headline, but social and political situations are moving pictures. Understanding how we arrived at this point of [record NYC homelessness](#) is central to solving the problem as it goes forward. Near the end of his administration, [Mayor Bloomberg said](#) the number of families in shelters was rising because “We have made our shelter system so much better...it is a much more pleasurable experience than ever before.” The Mayor had clearly not been to some of the [‘cluster’ apartments](#) the City was providing in the Bronx or he would have known that this was not the reason.

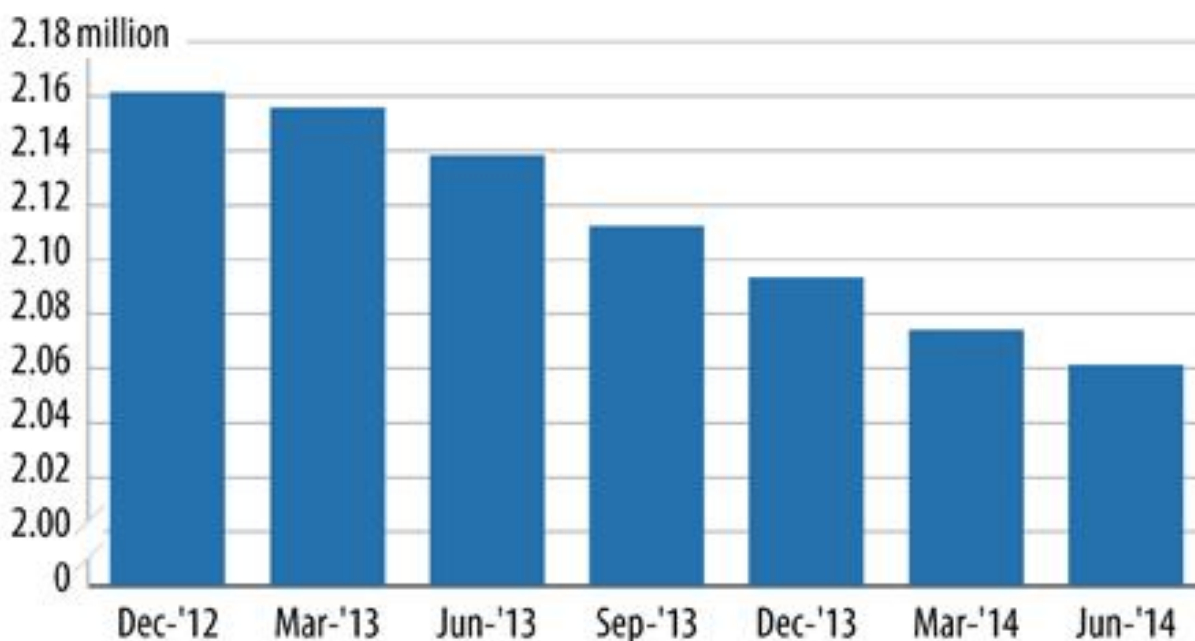


This New York Times graphic shows the fluctuating NYC homeless population by mayoral administration. The Advantage Program was in use from 2007 until 2012.

Even in well-run, [decent transitional shelters](#), homeless families are anxious to find a permanent home. When Section 8 or Housing Choice Vouchers were cut and the City

moved its Section 8 allocation process away from families seeking permanent housing, the time families spent in shelters jumped from 6-8 months to 18 months and longer. Families can't leave the shelters without money for rent. From 2007 to 2012, New York City and New York State shared in the funding of a declining benefit rental subsidy known as the Advantage Program. Despite the flaws of the program, families began to move into permanent housing with the support of the Advantage vouchers. When government support was withdrawn for these subsidies, not only did the shelter population increase, some of the same families with the now voided subsidies found themselves [facing eviction once again](#).

Budget Sequestration's Toll: 100,000 Fewer Low-Income Families Using Housing Vouchers



Note: Figures do not include more than 40,000 new "tenant-protection" vouchers and veterans' supportive housing (VASH) vouchers issued to families since December 2012. Tenant-protection vouchers replace public or other assisted housing that has been demolished or otherwise eliminated, so they do not represent a net gain in families assisted; Congress excluded VASH vouchers from sequestration.

Source: CBPP analysis of Department of Housing and Urban Development data

Center on Budget and Policy Priorities | cbpp.org

The reduction in available Federal Section 8 or Housing Choice Vouchers has also had an impact on the ability of low-income households to obtain rental subsidies to remain in their homes

FEPS is, as the name implies, for those facing eviction. There is another promising development that might further reduce the homeless caseload. Assemblyman Andrew Hevesi of Queens has suggested [funding to create Home Stability Support](#), which would provide families on public assistance with sufficient funds to pay a reasonable rent. This program is gaining increased support and has a chance to be included in this year's State budget.

There is no panacea for this complex problem. NYC cannot build its way out of the affordable housing crisis. Protecting the shrinking number of existing affordable rentals is critical. Most of the affordable housing in New York is located in privately owned, rent stabilized buildings. Rent stabilization regulations and tenants' lease protections require

strong oversight to protect tenants from unjustified rent increases. There is reason to think that the annual rent registration process intended to monitor rent stabilized rents and leases is not being effectively reviewed. Enforcement depends largely on tenant complaints, which many tenants are fearful to make. This system requires a closer examination to determine if tenants are adequately protected.

New affordable housing, continued increases in the minimum wage, and restored federal housing programs are all necessary. However, the best way to keep the homeless in their own neighborhoods is to put together the resources—through sufficient City and State rental subsidies, proactive code enforcement, and vigilant oversight of rent stabilization—to keep them in their own homes and apartments in the first place.