

City of Boston

39th Annual Homeless Census

Department of Neighborhood Development

On the night of January 30, 2019, Mayor Martin J. Walsh, city and community leaders, homeless provider agencies, and 350 volunteers conducted Boston's 39th annual homeless census. During the Census, the City of Boston collects data on individuals and families who are spending the night unsheltered on the street, staying in emergency shelter, transitional housing, or domestic violence shelter programs.

Fewer Unsheltered Persons on Boston's Streets

The number of unsheltered persons staying on the street the night of the census decreased from 163 women and men in 2018 to 121 in 2019, a 25.7 percent decrease. The low street count in Boston can be credited to year-round work moving unsheltered persons from the street into permanent supportive housing, family reunification or other long-term residential placements. According to the most recent U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR), on a single night in 2018, 35 percent of all homeless persons nationally were in unsheltered locations rather than in a homeless shelter. In Boston, the percentage of unsheltered homeless persons during the street count was less than two percent of the total homeless population. The 2019 count is the *lowest street count total in more than 30 years*.

Slight Increase in Overall Homelessness

In the aggregate, homelessness in Boston increased less than one percent in 2019, when compared with the 2018 Point in Time count, from 6,146 to 6,203. The number of homeless individuals was virtually unchanged from 2018, increasing by seven persons, from 2,341 persons in 2018 to 2,348 persons in 2019, a 0.3 percent change.

The number of individuals in emergency shelter on the night of the census in 2019 increased by 88 persons compared to 2018, a 4.9 percent increase. However, individuals living in transitional housing decreased by 9.7 percent.

The total number of family households increased by 32 families, from 1,189 families in 2018 to 1,221 families in 2019, a 3.1 percent change. The total of persons in families increased by 50 women, children and men, from 3,805 in 2018 to 3,855 in 2019, a one percent increase.

2019 Homeless Census Summary Data

Program Type	2018		2019		% Change	
	Individuals		Individuals		Individuals	
Single Adults						
Street Count	163		121		-25.7%	
Emergency Shelter	1,779		1867		+4.9%	
Transitional Housing	399		360		-9.7%	
Subtotal: Single Adults	2,341		2,348		0.3%	
Families	Persons in Families	Number of Families	Persons in Families	Number of Families	Persons in Families	Number of Families
Emergency Shelter	3,477	1,068	3,647	1,145	+4.9%	+7.2%
Hotels/Motels	0	0	0	0	0	0
Transitional Housing	175	55	119	45	-32%	-18.2%
Subtotal: Families	3,652	1,123	3,766	1,190	3.1%	5.9%
Domestic Violence	Persons in Families	Number of Families	Persons in Families	Number of Families	Persons in Families	Number of Families
Emergency Shelter	75	35	89	31	+18.6%	-11.4%
Transitional Housing	78	31	None reported			
Subtotal: Domestic Violence	153	66	89	31		
Total	6,146	1,189	6,203	1,221	0.9%	+2.7%

[1] Please Note: Single Adult Transitional Housing total includes 19 clients in Safe Haven

Key Takeaways and Analysis

Increased Regional Demand for Shelter

The number of persons and families from communities outside of Boston seeking shelter in Boston's emergency system is a major factor in these increases. On the night of the 2019 census, roughly 45 percent of adults in the individual system came from Boston; 35 percent originated from other Massachusetts cities or towns, while another 20 percent came from a community out of state. In the State-controlled family shelter program, the State added an additional 172 emergency shelter beds in Boston. Those additional beds were occupied by 44 families that came from other Massachusetts cities and towns, and 90 families that came from out of state locations.

Key Takeaways and Analysis, continued

Single Adults

- The number of single adults in transitional housing decreased by 9.7 percent, from 399 persons to 360. This reflects the continued shift to permanent supportive housing and the success of timely intervention via rapid rehousing programs to resolve temporary housing crises.

Families

- For the second consecutive year, there were no homeless families staying in Boston hotels, motels, or remaining unsheltered on the street on the night of the census.
- The number of family households in transitional housing programs decreased by 18.2 percent, from 55 to 45 households. The total number of persons in family transitional program beds decreased by 23 percent, from 175 women, children and men in 2018 to 119 in 2019.
- The total number of homeless family households in emergency shelter and domestic violence programs increased by 32 households, from 1,189 families in 2018 to 1,221 in 2019.
- The total number of persons in families— homeless children and adults in all family emergency shelter and domestic violence beds, increased by 50, from 3,805 to 3,855 persons, a 1.3 percent increase, up slightly from the prior year.

Domestic Violence Shelters

- In 2019 there were 14 more persons, but four fewer families, in domestic violence shelters than in 2018. The make-up of families in this crisis response system changes from week to week, but it would appear that there were households with a large number of family members in domestic violence beds that night.

Accomplishments to Date: City Strategies to Prevent and End Homelessness

Boston's Way Home, Mayor Martin J. Walsh's plan to end chronic and veteran homelessness was launched in 2015 and completed on December 31, 2018. During that time, the Boston Continuum of Care made a major push to end chronic homelessness. By the end of the four year plan implementation, Boston agencies had stably housed 1032 formerly homeless Veterans and ended 4,000 years of homelessness for 721 chronically homeless individuals, and persons with disabling conditions.

Looking ahead to FY 2020

City agencies and community partners will continue to focus on increasing housing opportunities for chronically homeless adults, families, and homeless and at-risk youth and young adults. These efforts include:

Housing Homeless Families

In April 2019, Mayor Walsh and the Boston Housing Authority announced the *Leading the Way Home* program, which will provide 1,000 HUD Section 8 vouchers to Boston families in the State-funded family emergency assistance shelter system.

Creating New Permanent Supportive Housing

In January 2018, Mayor Martin J. Walsh launched the [Boston's Way Home Fund](#) with a goal of raising \$10 Million to create 200 new supportive, sustainable, permanent housing units for chronically homeless men and women. In addition to the 1,000 family vouchers, the Boston Housing Authority will make 250 mobile vouchers available to house chronically homeless adults, veterans, and young adults.

Youth and Young Adult Homelessness

In April 2018, the City of Boston convened 90 organizations, youth and young adult advisers with lived experience of homelessness, and community non-profit partners to develop a comprehensive community plan to prevent and end youth and young adult homelessness. In March 2019, HUD approved the community plan to access federal funding (up to \$4.9 million). Boston has issued a Request for Proposals for organizations and entities to implement new housing interventions dedicated to youth and young adults experiencing homelessness.