

City of Boston

37th Annual Homeless Census

Department of Neighborhood Development

On the night of January 25, 2017, Mayor Martin J. Walsh, city and community leaders, 400 volunteers and homeless provider agencies conducted Boston's 37th annual homeless census. During the Census, the City of Boston collects data on programs serving homeless individuals across three populations: (1) single adults, (2) families, and (3) victims of domestic violence.

In aggregate, homelessness in the City of Boston fell by five percent: from 6,628 in 2016 to 6,327 in 2017. This represents 301 fewer homeless men, women, and children in 2017 as compared to last year. The number of homeless families fell by seven percent from 1,408 in 2016 to 1,304 in 2017.

Key findings regarding each population and a summary table follow:

Single Adults

- The number of individual homeless adults decreased by six percent, from 2,522 in 2016 to 2,397 in 2017
- 125 fewer individuals were staying in emergency shelter on the night of the count in 2017 as compared to 2016. This represents a seven percent decrease and is the first time in three years that the number of single adults in emergency shelter declined
- Boston continues to see low numbers of homeless adults living on the streets compared to most major cities. There were 186 unsheltered homeless individuals counted on the night of the census, representing three percent of all homeless individuals in Boston. No families were staying on the street on the night of the count
- There were 19 more unsheltered homeless individuals in Boston in 2017 as compared to 2016. Fluctuations in the number of individuals on the street are anticipated; individuals tend to move between the street and shelter depending on a variety of factors, including weather
- When viewed in aggregate, the number of individuals staying on the street and in emergency shelter declined by 5 percent between 2016 and 2017

Single Adults: Trends in Community of Origin

- Boston has always had a significant portion of individuals in shelter from other places. In January 2017, approximately 40 percent of all individuals in shelter were from outside of Boston
- A larger proportion of new individuals entering shelter are from outside of Boston. In January 2017, 405 individuals entered the emergency shelter system for the first time. City estimates show that over half of these individuals were from outside of Boston

Families

- The total number of persons in families, i.e., homeless men, women and children in family households, decreased by four percent, from 3,965 to 3,800 persons. The number of homeless families declined by eight percent, from 1,354 families in 2016 to 1,239 in 2017
- The State has been focusing its efforts on moving families out of hotels and motels and into emergency and transitional shelters where they can more readily access services. The number of homeless individuals in hotels and motels decreased by eighty five percent: from 365 in 2016 to 54 in 2017

City and State Policies to Address Homelessness

- In 2014, the City launched Boston's Way Home, the Administration's plan to end chronic and veteran homelessness. The plan calls for reaching these goals by putting housing first, dramatically redesigning the way we deliver services to the homeless, increasing resources devoted to housing the homeless, and deploying new technologies to match formerly homeless people with housing and services
- Since the launch of the plan, more than one thousand people have been housed. In 2016 alone, 244 chronically homeless individuals -- people with disabling conditions and long histories of homelessness -- were housed. This represents more than 1,500 combined years of homelessness ended
- When the City launched its first plan to end veteran homelessness, there were 414 homeless veterans in Boston. Since then, 842 homeless veterans - more than twice that number -- have been housed

Impact of City Policies: Reducing the Length of Stay

- One of the key goals of the City's plan to end chronic and veteran homelessness a reduction in the amount of time individuals remain in shelter. The City's analysis showed that the number of individuals in the shelter system for six months or more declined by approximately 50 percent between 2016 and 2017, reflecting the City's efforts to permanently house individuals with long histories of homelessness
- The number of individuals entering shelter and leaving quickly has increased. For example, the number of individuals whose stays in shelter lasted one week or less increased dramatically between 2016 and 2017
- This is likely reflective of new systems in that have been put in place, such as the hiring of shelter staff trained to start connecting newcomers to housing and support as soon as they enter the system, rather than letting them remain in shelter with no services

2017 Homeless Census Summary Data¹

	2016		2017		% Change	
Program Type						
Single Adults	Individuals		Individuals		Individuals	
Street Count	167		186		11%	
Emergency Shelter	1,887		1,762		-7%	
Transitional Housing	468		431		-8%	
Subtotal: Single Adults	2,522		2,379		-6%	
Families	Persons in Families	Number of Families	Persons in Families	Number of Families	Persons in Families	Number of Families
Emergency Shelter	3,217	1,086	3,385	1,064	5%	-2%
Hotels/Motels	365	123	54	18	-85%	-85%
Transitional Housing	383	145	361	157	-6%	8%
Subtotal: Families	3,965	1,354	3,800	1,239	-4%	-8%
Domestic Violence	Persons in Families	Number of Families	Persons in Families	Number of Families	Persons in Families	Number of Families
Emergency Shelter	73	27	83	34	14%	26%
Transitional Housing	68	27	65	31	-4%	15%
Subtotal: Domestic Violence	141	54	148	65	5%	20%
Total	6,628	1,408	6,327	1,304	-5%	-7%

[1] Please Note: The numbers reported in 2016 have been revised. Medical facilities were removed from the count. In addition, a number of programs were recategorized based on their Continuum of Care Annual Housing Inventory Listing to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development as of January 2017.