

City of Boston

40th Annual Homeless Census

Department of Neighborhood Development

On the night of January 29, 2020, Mayor Martin J. Walsh, city and community leaders, homeless provider agencies, and more than 350 volunteers conducted Boston’s 40th annual homeless census. During this 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.

Summary Data

City of Boston 2020 Homeless Census Summary Data

| Program Type | 2019 | | 2020 | | % Change | |
|------------------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------|
| | Individuals | | Individuals | | Individuals | |
| Single Adults | | | | | | |
| Street Count | 121 | | 135 | | +11.6% | |
| Emergency Shelter | 1,867 | | 1,593 | | -14.7% | |
| Transitional Housing | 360 | | 387 | | +7.5% | |
| Subtotal: Single Adults | 2,348 | | 2,115 | | -9.9% | |
| Families | Persons in Families | Number of Families | Persons in Families | Number of Families | Persons in Families | Number of Families |
| Emergency Shelter | 3,647 | 1,145 | 3,900 | 1,240 | +6.9% | +8.3% |
| Hotels/Motels | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0% | 0% |
| Transitional Housing | 119 | 45 | 121 | 54 | +1.7% | +20% |
| Subtotal: Families | 3,766 | 1,190 | 4,021 | 1,294 | +6.8% | +8.7% |
| Domestic Violence | Persons in Families | Number of Families | Persons in Families | Number of Families | Persons in Families | Number of Families |
| Emergency Shelter | 89 | 31 | 56 | 24 | -37.1% | -22.6% |
| Transitional Housing | None reported | | 0 | 0 | | |
| Subtotal: Domestic Violence | 89 | 31 | 56 | 24 | -37.1% | -22.6% |
| Total | 6,203 | 1,221 | 6,192 | 1,318 | -0.2% | +7.9% |

Key Findings by Populations

Single Adults

- The number of unsheltered persons staying on the street on the night of the census increased slightly from 121 women and men in 2019 to 135 in 2020, an increase of 11.6 percent. This count remained lower than 2018, when 163 women and men were staying on the street. The 2019 street count total was Boston's lowest street count total in more than 30 years. The increase is due to warmer weather on the night of the January 2020 count than the January 2019; as a consequence, more individuals elected to stay outside rather than seek shelter, and fewer accepted transport to shelter.
- The number of individuals in emergency shelter on the night of the census in 2020 decreased by 274 persons compared to 2019, a 14.7 percent decrease. This was due to an increase in the number of adult individuals exiting shelter to permanent housing and an increase in the number of adults successfully diverted from shelter to a safe alternative placement.
- The number of single adults staying in transitional housing increased by 7.5 percent, from 360 persons to 387. The increase is due to an increase in veterans staying in transitional housing programs that provide short-term housing and support services while they work towards permanent housing. The number of veterans in emergency shelter decreased from 2019 to 2020.

Families

- For the third consecutive year, there were no homeless families staying in Boston hotels or motels on the night of the census.
- There were no unsheltered families on the streets of Boston on the night of the census, as has been true for more than the past decade.
- The total number of homeless persons in families – homeless children and adults in all family emergency shelter and transitional housing – increased by 50, from 3,766 to 4,021 persons, a 6.8 percent increase from 2019 to 2020.
- The number of family households in transitional housing programs increased by 20 percent, from 45 to 54 households. The total number of persons in family transitional program beds increased by 1.7 percent, from 119 women, children and men in 2019 to 121 in 2020.
- The total number of homeless family households in emergency shelter and transitional housing programs increased by 104 households, from 1,190 families in 2019 to 1,294 in 2020.

Domestic Violence Shelters

- In 2019 there were 33 fewer persons and 7 fewer families in domestic violence shelters on the night of the census compared to 2019.
- There were no families in domestic violence transitional housing in Boston on the night of the census in 2019 or 2020.

Increased Regional Demand for Shelter

The number of persons and families from communities outside of Boston seeking shelter here is putting pressure on the emergency system for both individual adult and family shelters in Boston. In January 2020, 31.6 percent of individuals in Boston's shelters reporting a community of origin came from other Massachusetts cities and towns, while 61.4 percent came from Boston, and 7 percent came from outside of Massachusetts.

Among families in shelter, on the night of the census 56.8 percent of homeless families in Boston came from Boston, while 26.6 percent came from other Massachusetts cities or towns, and 13.6 percent came from outside of Massachusetts.

Year over Year Findings and Proposed Actions

Decrease in Single Adult Homelessness in Shelters

Single adult homelessness in the City of Boston decreased by 9.9 percent from the previous annual census, from 2,348 single adults staying in emergency shelters, transitional housing, or living unsheltered in 2019 to 2,115 in 2020. The change was largely driven by a decrease in single adults in emergency shelters, from 1,867 in 2019 to 1,593 in 2020, a 14.7 percent reduction.

Actions in 2020

The City is investing \$2 million in shelter diversion in Fiscal Year 2021 (July 1, 2020 - June 30, 2021) leveraging the expertise developed by our provider partners Pine Street Inn and the Boston Public Health Commission to ensure that all individual adults seeking shelter in Boston receive diversion services and support to access safe alternatives to shelter if they are available.

Slight Increase in Unsheltered Persons on Boston's Streets

The number of unsheltered persons on the night of the census increased from 121 women and men in 2019 to 135 in 2020, or 11.6 percent. This number is still lower than 2018, when 163 women and men were staying on the street. The 2019 street count total was Boston's lowest street count total in 30 years. The January 2019 count was conducted on a night when a winter storm brought snow and extremely cold temperatures and wind chill near or below zero. In contrast, the January 2020 count was conducted on a night with

temperatures near forty degrees. As a consequence, more individuals elected to stay outside rather than seek shelter, and fewer accepted transport to shelter.

Boston continues to have one of the lowest rates of unsheltered homelessness in the country, according to the most recent U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) and Point-In-Time Count, with less than 2 percent of people experiencing homelessness staying on the street on a single night in 2019, the most recent year for which reports have currently been published. Nationally, 37 percent of all homeless persons were unsheltered in 2019.

Actions in 2020

In FY21, the City is investing in enhanced street outreach programs that can assist more vulnerable persons in need of services in public places, such as parks, plazas, libraries, and green spaces. The Pine Street Inn street outreach team has been able to expand coverage to areas in Boston's neighborhoods such as Nubian Square, Upham's Corner, Jamaica Plain, North Dorchester, and East Boston, and is responding to more 311 requests in residential neighborhoods that have seen more people in public places due to the opioid epidemic and COVID-19.

Increase in Family Homelessness

The total number of families experiencing homelessness in Boston increased by 8.7 percent, from 1,190 families in 2019 to 1,294 families in 2020. The total number of homeless persons in families rose by 6.8 percent, from 3,766 in 2019 to 4,021 in 2020.

Actions in 2020

On October 28, 2019, Councilor Essaibi-George filed an ordinance to create the Special Commission on Ending Family Homelessness. In FY21, the City will hire an Advisor to End Family Homelessness at DND to staff the Special Commission, organize Boston's strategies to prevent and end family homelessness and drive advocacy with state systems to improve outcomes for homeless families.

On March 30, 2020, Mayor Walsh announced a partnership between the Boston Housing Authority (BHA) and Boston Public Schools (BPS) to award 1,000 housing vouchers to families with BPS students experiencing homelessness. To date, more than 900 families have been housed through this partnership.

Creating New Permanent Supportive Housing

In January 2018, Mayor 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. The fund reached its goal in January 2020, two years ahead of schedule, and locations for supportive housing projects are being identified.

Actions in 2020

In addition to the vouchers for families listed above, in January 2020 Mayor Walsh announced the creation of Boston's first City-funded voucher program to support and stabilize homeless and low-income households. The program will be administered by the Boston Housing Authority (BHA).

Ending Youth and Young Adult Homelessness

In November 2019, Mayor Walsh announced [Boston's Rising to the Challenge](#), a collaborative community-wide action plan to prevent and end youth and young adult (YYA) homelessness in Boston.

The Plan identified that in order to end youth homelessness by 2023, the City needed to add 285 new youth housing opportunities. Federal funding through the Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program (YHDP) added 157 of those units.

Actions in 2020

The YHDP programs launched in October 2019, and within the first year, 100 formerly homeless YYA have been housed.

The City also included in its FY21 budget \$1 million to support youth housing programs. DND is funding 100 new youth housing opportunities with this funding, and incorporating peer navigation to assist YYA in accessing housing and services. Awards are scheduled to be announced in December 2020, and programs will start in January 2021.

Moreover, DND is adding 20 new youth housing units with funding from the Emergency Solutions Grant CARES Act. That, and a collaboration with a private funder that is adding 10 new youth housing units in 2021, increased the total youth housing opportunities being added to the City to 287 - 100 percent of the need modeled in the Plan; 157 in 2020 and 130 in 2021.