



BRIEFING PAPER

Capacity Crunch: The NYC Shelter System Risks Running Out of Shelter Beds for the Rising Number of Homeless Single Adults

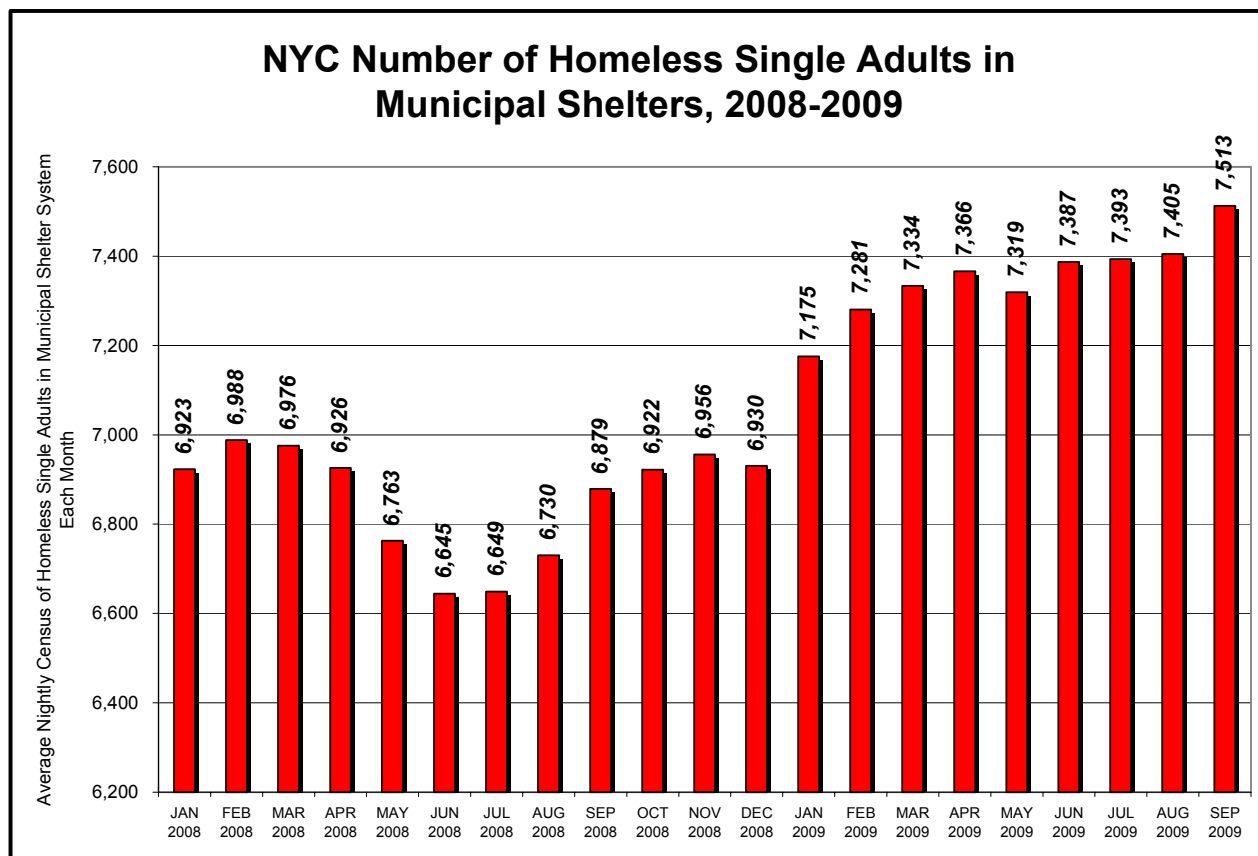
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By Patrick Markee, Senior Policy Analyst, Coalition for the Homeless

The number of homeless single adults in the New York City municipal shelter system has risen dramatically this year, largely as a result of rising unemployment and the continuing shortage of affordable rental housing. As winter approaches, the municipal shelter system is virtually at capacity and is at enormous risk of running out of available shelter beds. Indeed, on the night of September 30th there were only two available shelter beds for homeless men, and eight available beds for homeless women.

Unfortunately, NYC Department of Homeless Services officials have offered no plan to expand shelter capacity to meet rising need, even as temperatures are falling and the number of homeless single men and women in municipal shelters continues to increase.

Coalition for the Homeless urges the Bloomberg administration to add needed shelter beds immediately in order to meet the growing need for emergency shelter for homeless men and women this winter. In the long term, the Coalition urges Mayor Bloomberg to accelerate the development of permanent supportive housing for homeless individuals living with mental illness and other special needs, and to restore the City's longstanding and successful policy of prioritizing homeless New Yorkers for Federal housing assistance.



Background: Dramatic Increase in Homeless Individuals in NYC Shelter System

Amidst rising unemployment and the acute shortage of low-cost rental housing, the number of homeless single adults has risen dramatically this year. Following are highlights of this trend:

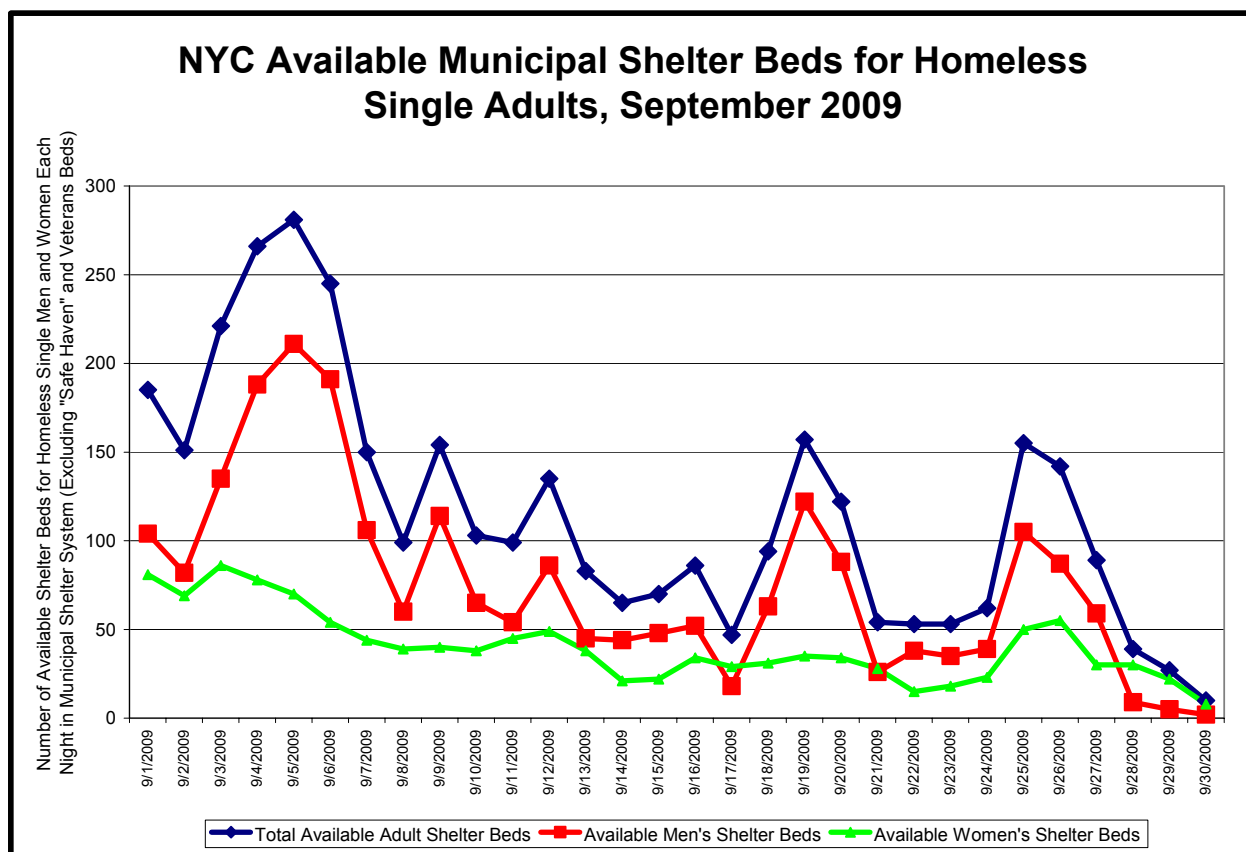
- Even before winter begins, the number of homeless single adults in the municipal shelter system this year has increased by more than 7 percent – the largest one-year increase since the 2001 economic recession, and one of the largest year-to-year increases in more than two decades.
- So far this year, the number of homeless single adults in the municipal shelter system has risen every month except for one – a virtually unprecedented trend.
- Historically, the homeless adult shelter population rises in winter months and declines in the warm-weather summer months. However, this year the number of homeless single adults in municipal shelter rose throughout the summer, a trend which has not occurred since the 2001 economic recession.
- So far this year, the number of homeless men seeking shelter at the City's central intake center (located at the Bellevue shelter on the east side of Manhattan) has increased by 8 percent compared to last year. The number of homeless men seeking shelter who are new to the shelter system has increased by 10 percent.

NYC Homeless Men Seeking Shelter Each Day at Intake Center (average daily intake)			
	2008	2009 (YTD)	Change
Homeless Men Seeking Shelter Daily (Avg.)	86	93	8%
Homeless Men New to Shelter System	24	27	10%
Homeless Men Out of Shelter > 1 Year	21	23	11%
Homeless Men Out of Shelter < 1 Year	40	43	5%

- This year is the first to see an increase in the homeless adult shelter population since 2004. The number of homeless adults residing in NYC municipal shelters had declined in recent years, largely due to an expansion in the number of permanent supportive housing units and the targeting of supportive housing units to long-time shelter residents.

NYC Municipal Shelter System Running Out of Beds for Homeless Single Adults

- As the number of homeless adults has risen this year, municipal shelters for homeless single men and women have been at more than 99 percent of capacity. At the same time, shelters for homeless veterans and for chronic street homeless individuals (so-called “safe haven” shelters) – whose use is restricted to special populations – have also been near capacity.
- Currently there are 7,704 total municipal shelter beds for homeless single adults (which includes 6,912 municipal shelter beds, 411 “safe haven” beds, and 381 beds for homeless veterans). On many recent nights there have been more than 7,500 homeless adults in municipal shelters, utilizing more than 97 percent of all shelter beds.
- This September, the number of available municipal shelter beds for homeless adults has reached critically low levels. On many nights there were fewer than 25 available beds for homeless women and fewer than 50 beds for homeless men. On the night of September 30th, there were only two available shelter beds for homeless men, and only eight available beds for homeless women.



- Despite the acute shortage of shelter beds, NYC Department of Homeless Services officials have failed to articulate a plan for adding needed shelter capacity. (In fact, this summer the City actually closed a 150-bed shelter for homeless men.) In the cold-weather winter months, the nightly homeless adult shelter population historically increases by hundreds of people.

The Need for Immediate and Long-term Action

The Bloomberg administration needs to act now in order to avoid an even worse shelter capacity crisis this winter. Coalition for the Homeless calls on Mayor Bloomberg to enact the following immediate and long-term measures:

1. Expand Emergency Shelter Capacity for Homeless Adults This Winter:

- The NYC Department of Homeless Services must add new shelter beds to the municipal shelter system this winter sufficient to meet the rising need for shelter.

2. Accelerate Construction of Permanent Supportive Housing:

- In 2005, the City and State signed a ten-year agreement to provide permanent supportive housing for homeless people living with mental illness and other special needs.
- However, more than half of the newly-constructed supportive housing – 3,276 units of the planned 6,250 new units – will not be built until at least 2011.
- City and State officials should accelerate the development of supportive housing for homeless people with special needs.

3. Target Federal Housing Aid to the Homeless:

- In 2005, the Bloomberg administration cut off homeless New Yorkers from longstanding priority for Federal housing programs, including Section 8 vouchers and public housing.

- This year the City will distribute more than 12,000 Section 8 vouchers and more than 5,000 public housing apartments will be available to rent – but virtually none to the homeless.
- Numerous studies show that Section 8 vouchers successfully reduce family homelessness.
- Reversing the City's misguided policy will move thousands of homeless families and individuals to permanent housing – and will save City taxpayer dollars spent on emergency shelter.

*Note: All homeless shelter population data is from the New York City Department of Homeless Services.
For more information, please visit www.coalitionforthehomeless.org.*