



A Memorandum for District 4
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Homelessness

In recent years, New York's homeless population has soared to levels not seen since the Great Depression. According to the Coalition for the Homeless, there are 60,717 homeless people in New York City, one-third of whom are children (as of June 2017). In addition, the number of New Yorkers sleeping in shelters is a massive 75 percent greater than it was 10 years ago, before the 2008 recession began.¹

Mayor de Blasio's recent plan to open an additional 90 shelters over the next five years will not keep pace with the demand as rates of homelessness continue to rise and will not provide New Yorkers experiencing homelessness the stability they need to find permanent housing.² A more comprehensive, long-term approach to finding permanent housing solutions for low-income New Yorkers is going to be necessary to stop this crisis in its tracks.

Housing First policy, a homeless assistance approach that prioritizes providing permanent housing without preconditions to people experiencing homelessness, has been found to be a cost-efficient and effective solution for reducing homelessness when implemented in Australia, Canada, Finland, France, and Japan.³ Local advocacy organization Picture the

¹"Basic Facts About Homelessness: New York City." *Coalition For The Homeless*. N.p., n.d. Web. <http://www.coalitionforthehomeless.org/basic-facts-about-homelessness-new-york-city/>

²Stewart, Nikita. "New York Adding Shelter Options for Homeless Victims of Domestic Abuse." *The New York Times*. The New York Times Company, 14 June 2017. Web. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/14/nyregion/new-york-domestic-violence-homeless-shelters.html>

³Gulcur, Leyla, Ana Stefancic, Marybeth Shinn, Sam Tsemberis, and Sean N. Fischer. "Housing, Hospitalization, and Cost Outcomes for Homeless Individuals with Psychiatric Disabilities Participating in Continuum of Care and Housing First Programmes." *Wiley Online Library*. John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., 09 Apr. 2003. Web. <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/casp.723/abstract>

Homeless has outlined a three-pronged plan, created in collaboration with non-profit housing developers, that aligns with the characteristics of Housing First policies, called the Gaining Ground Pilot Program.

First, the Gaining Ground Pilot Program calls for the conversion of thousands of current cluster-site shelter units into rent-regulated housing, which would create over 3,000 new units of affordable housing. Second, the plan calls for the rehabilitation of thousands of units of City-owned vacant property and the development of City-owned vacant land into housing for homeless and extremely low-income populations. Finally, the Gaining Ground Pilot Program urges the City to re-evaluate its protocol around city-owned and partially vacant properties, particularly buildings in the NYC Housing Preservation and Development's Tenant Interim Lease and Affordable Neighborhood Cooperative programs, to preserve existing low-cost housing for tenants.⁴

While these proposals will likely be costly to the City in the short-term, Housing First policies implemented around the world, like the Gaining Ground Pilot Program, have been found to be cost efficient in the long-term. Providing access to housing generally results in cost savings for communities because housed people are less likely to use emergency services, including hospital and emergency shelters, or be put in jails, than those who are homeless. One study found an average cost savings on emergency services of \$31,545 per person housed in a

⁴*The Gaining Ground Pilot Project*. Rep. Picture The Homeless, n.d. Web. <http://picturethehomeless.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Gaining-Ground-Pilot-Project-Executive-Summary.pdf>

Housing First program over the course of two years.⁵ Another study showed that a Housing First program could cost up to \$23,000 less per consumer per year than a shelter program.⁶

With the rates of people experiencing homelessness in our city continuing to skyrocket, investing in data-driven, cost-effective, policies with long-term solutions, such as Housing First policies like the Gaining Ground Pilot Program, will be a priority for me in City Council.

⁵Perlman, Jennifer, and John Parvensky. *Denver Housing First Collaborative Cost Benefit Analysis and Program Outcomes Report*. Rep. Colorado Coalition for the Homeless, 11 Dec. 2006. Web. https://shnny.org/uploads/Supportive_Housing_in_Denver.pdf

⁶Stefancic, A., and S. Tsemberis. "Housing First for Long-term Shelter Dwellers with Psychiatric Disabilities in a Suburban County: A Four-year Study of Housing Access and Retention." *National Center for Biotechnology Information*. U.S. National Library of Medicine, July 2007. Web. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/17592778>