



Inside the Prevention Point navigation center

PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA

Tale of Two Cities

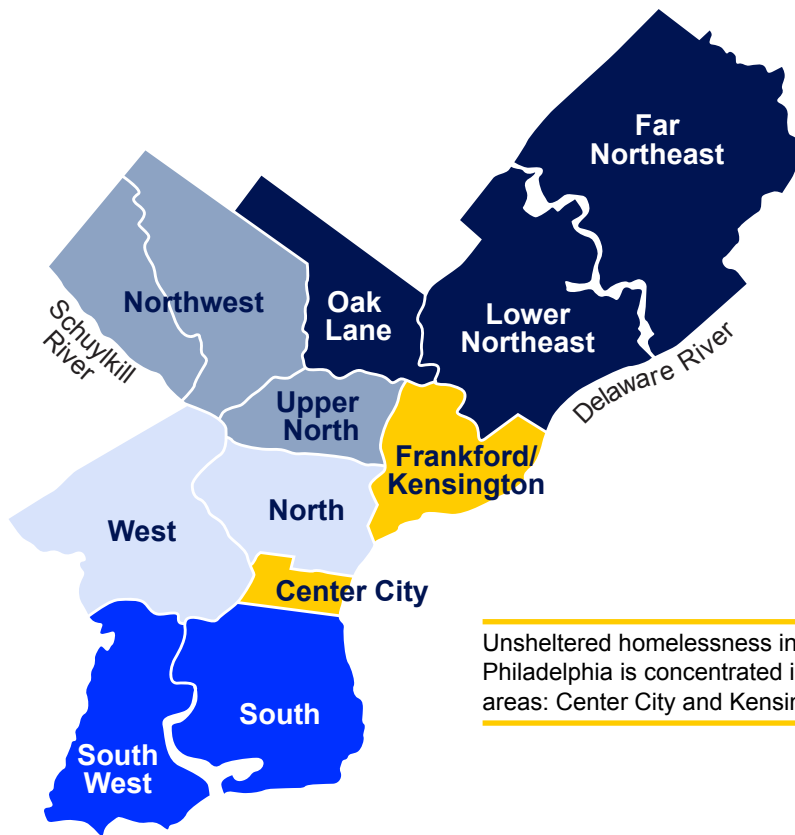
From 2014 to 2019, Philadelphia’s unsheltered population increased significantly—as the city faced two distinct concentrations of unsheltered homelessness.

Philadelphia has traditionally had an extensive shelter network with strong outreach services and a longstanding commitment to a Housing First model. Most of Philadelphia’s unsheltered population has been located in or near Philadelphia’s downtown area, known as Center City, where they were part of the busy, crowded downtown scene and had access to many of the city’s homeless and other social services.

In 2015 unsheltered homelessness started increasing in the Kensington section of the city, a community struggling with poverty and the availability of high quality, inexpensive opioids. The resulting encampments became the most visible manifestation of the ravages brought on by extreme poverty and the opioid epidemic.

The City of Philadelphia was overmatched by the magnitude of the increase and responded by setting aside bureaucratic caution to implement innovative approaches in both Kensington and Center City. They built upon an extensive homeless services infrastructure and convened a strong coalition of municipal and nonprofit entities as well as community residents as part of addressing unsheltered homelessness.

HOUSING FIRST APPROACH
Since the mid-2000’s, Philadelphia has used Housing First as the guiding strategy for placing homeless individuals into permanent housing. In 2016 it became the first city to use Housing First to house people with opioid use disorders. Under Housing First, housing is provided as quickly and directly as possible.¹



Unsheltered homelessness in Philadelphia is concentrated in two areas: Center City and Kensington.

Two city agencies key to Philly's homeless services infrastructure

At the core of Philadelphia's homeless services infrastructure are two city agencies, the Office of Homeless Services (OHS) and the Department of Behavioral Health and Intellectual Disability Services (DBHIDS).

OHS has been the centralized funding and coordination mechanism for Philadelphia's network of homeless shelters since the 1980s. In 2018, the City provided \$51 million in general funds to OHS in addition to the federal and state assistance received.

Because of this funding, about 80 percent of Philadelphia's homeless population spent the night in shelters or transitional housing—even with the increase in the number of people living unsheltered.

DBHIDS funds and administers homeless outreach services provided by five nonprofit agencies, including Project HOME, which operates the Outreach Coordination Center (OCC). OCC provides a centralized dispatch

throughout the city from a homeless outreach hotline. The participating agencies respond to specific situations aligned with the target populations and geographic areas they serve to link those they engage with appropriate housing and services.

INNOVATIVE FEATURE: KENSINGTON— ADDRESSING UNSHELTERED HOMELESSNESS AND OPIOID USE

In Fall 2017, four large encampments sprung up under a succession of railway overpasses in the Kensington section of Philadelphia. By the winter of 2017–18, police were regularly counting 200 unsheltered people in these encampments. Surveys indicated opioid use among this group was near ubiquitous. As these camps became more entrenched, political and community pressure grew for the City of Philadelphia

“Despite unprecedented pressures across the nation—a widening gap between rich and poor, a lack of affordable housing, the opioid crisis, and America’s 30-year homelessness crisis—Philadelphia is ahead of the curve developing compassionate, effective solutions.”

Liz Hersh
OHS Director

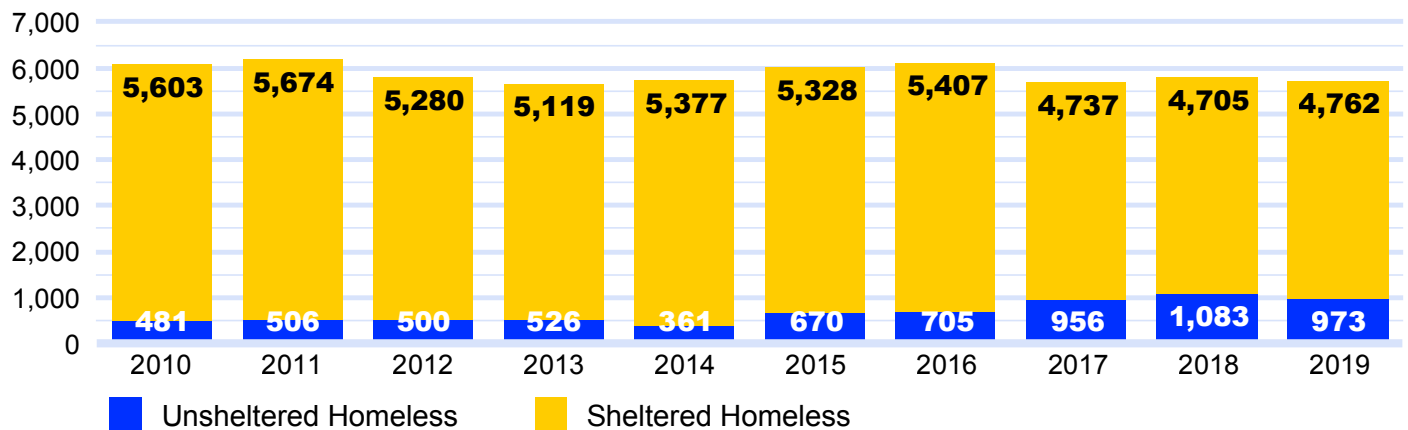
to address the encampments, both the needs of the people staying in the encampments and the problems related to the location of the encampments.

A City-led coalition of municipal entities and community nonprofit organizations with community input developed the Encampment Resolution Pilot (ERP). The core of this approach established a 30-day engagement period prior to the announced closure date. During this time, outreach teams sought to place those sleeping in the encampments into temporary housing and treatment services, continue working with those accepting services towards longer-term placements, and engage those who initially declined emergency housing placement.

Pilot incorporated numerous person-centered features in closing the encampments.

➤ Establishing treatment on-demand, in conjunction with suboxone availability, assisted people in managing withdrawal symptoms, and facilitated access to treatment services.

Philadelphia, PA Homelessness Trends



Even though unsheltered homelessness has increased in recent years, the proportion of the overall homeless population that is unsheltered is among the lowest in major U.S. cities.

Source: <https://www.hudexchange.info/programs/coc/coc-homeless-populations-and-subpopulations-reports/>

- >Ninety beds of low-barrier temporary housing—referred to as navigation or respite centers—were available for those in the encampments and provided a base for providing ongoing case management services.
- >Barriers for entering detoxification and drug treatment services—requirements for ID, insurance precertification, etc.—were removed and allowed rapid placements into these key services.
- >Outreach workers used these housing and substance use resources to get people to move from the encampments and continued to engage both those who moved and who were displaced in the months following the encampment closure.
- >The Philadelphia Police Department (PPD) adopted a public health-oriented approach to the co-occurring homelessness and opioid use in Kensington, emphasizing practices that declined to arrest and cite in favor of calling outreach services to assist in homeless situations.
- >A homeless services detail in PPD’s 24th District, which covers Kensington, focused specifically on homeless individuals and their needs, providing social services and medical efforts.

“The challenge of homeless people and panhandlers on Center City streets has gotten so large, the business community had to kick in.”²

Paul Levy
Center City District Director

- >PPD implemented a Police Assisted Diversion program where all police officers are points of contact for persons seeking treatment.
- In October 2018, six months after ERP started, of the 189 people from encampments targeted for services, 36 people (20.3 percent) received long-term housing or recovery services through the ERP, and another 36 received at least temporary housing or treatment services.
- In total, 109 people (61.6 percent) interacted with outreach workers to some degree during the six-month period allowing them a direct opportunity to engage in services. The ongoing provision of services let many follow through with housing and recovery services, and prevented a lapse into homelessness after the encampment was cleared.

As a pilot, ERP had promising results but a limited impact given the magnitude of the opioid crisis. Subsequently, the City of Philadelphia adopted elements of ERP into the Philadelphia Resilience Project (PRP) that addressed homelessness and other problems surrounding the opioid crisis throughout the Kensington area. The City also implemented reduced barriers to admission for detox and treatment services system-wide and mandated that all providers in the City’s treatment system have available medication-assisted therapy, a best practice in treating opioid use.

**INNOVATIVE FEATURE:
CENTER CITY—**

ADDRESSING UNSHELTERED HOMELESSNESS IN A DOWNTOWN SETTING

The growth in the homeless population in recent years has also impacted Center City and led to new measures to assist people in moving out of homelessness.

“Ambassadors of Hope” teams

Three organizations—one of Philadelphia’s leading homeless providers, Center City’s Business Improvement District, and PPD’s homeless services detail—have jointly created, funded, and staffed “Ambassadors of Hope” teams to engage homeless people and connect them with services without resorting to citation or arrest. These entities, which once took very different approaches to addressing homelessness, are now working together cooperatively on this initiative.

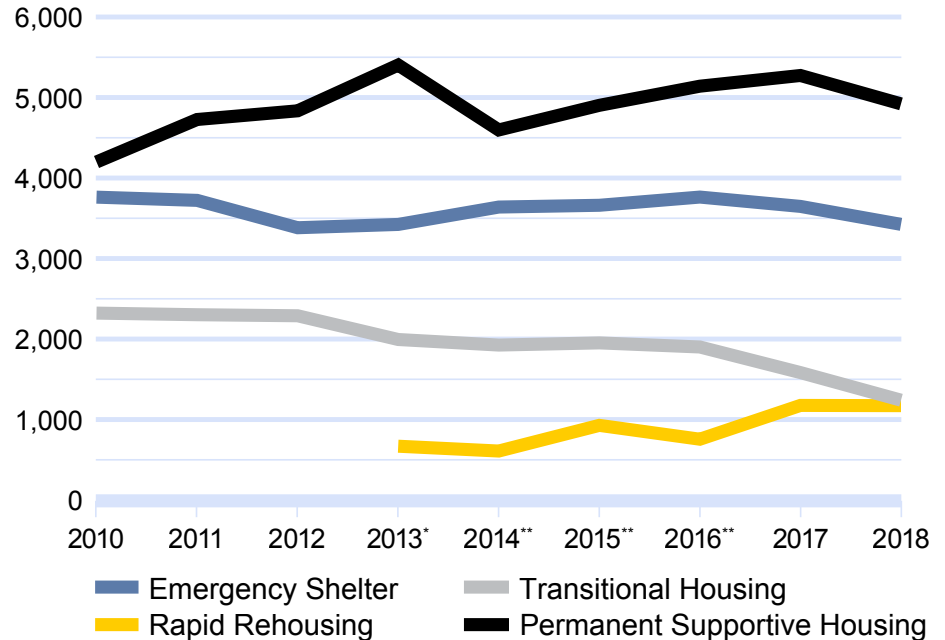
Hub of Hope: The nation’s only subterranean day center

Hub of Hope is in an 11,000-square-foot disused SEPTA police substation along a subway concourse that provides underground passage between Suburban Station and City Hall. It is a refuge from the downtown and public transit milieu. Hub of Hope serves as a walk-in engagement center and a place to connect with housing and services. In addition, it also provides a low-barrier environment and the usual day center services such as meals, laundry, and a place to spend the day.

Police use public health orientation

Two law enforcement agencies have committed themselves to responding to homelessness with a public health orientation that recognizes many presenting problems are better addressed through services other than law enforcement. PPD has a homeless services detail that exclusively responds to homeless-related calls. The detail

Philadelphia, PA Total Year-Round Beds Trends



As demand for temporary and permanent housing in Philadelphia has increased, housing resources for the homeless population have remained flat.

* 2013 Counts RRH in Total Year-Round Beds, HMIS Participation, and Total Beds for Households with/without Children.

** 2014–2016 has two types of RRH values: one that includes demonstration programs and one that excludes demonstration programs. The value including demonstration programs was used for Total Year-Round Beds (RRH).

Source: <https://www.hudexchange.info/resource/3031/pit-and-hic-data-since-2007/>

“The City deserves credit for creating what is essentially a thoughtful response: one that puts humanity first and counters the usual government response of denial, incarceration, demonization, and despair.”³

*Philadelphia Inquirer Editorial Board
2018*

works closely with outreach service providers to engage people with housing and services. Additionally, transit police from the Southeastern Pennsylvania Transit Authority (SEPTA) patrol an underground network of tunnels, transit stops, and concourses that are part of Philadelphia’s public transportation system. SEPTA police

are trained in how to interact with individuals who are homeless. The department has added a full-time mental health worker on staff to enable a therapeutic rather than law enforcement approach to those with serious mental illness living in transit hubs.

KEY LESSONS

Philadelphia has experienced a significant increase in unsheltered homelessness since 2014. The supplies of both temporary and permanent housing have not kept pace with this growth. The increase has been most apparent in two areas in Philadelphia: Kensington and Center City. In both places, the City has adopted various measures to maintain a person-centered approach to homeless and substance use services, even in the face of substantial pressure to simply clear the growing population that is unsheltered. From this process, Philadelphia offers these key lessons:

Collaborate to successfully carry out initiatives

In Kensington, multiple City departments, nonprofit entities, and community groups worked together under the City's leadership. Center City showcased the ability of homeless services, business interests, and police to collaborate in a person-centered outreach approach.

Build on previous efforts and adapt to local circumstances

Philadelphia's ERP initiative built on an existing model of providing temporary and long-term low-barrier and recovery-oriented housing to persons displaced from encampments.

They added to this model by including access to drug treatment services and institutionalizing a harm reduction approach to homelessness and substance use. Philadelphia's approach now offers a model for other cities to address similar encampments and has contributed to the broader approach embraced by the Philadelphia Resilience Project.

Use data to inform and assess homeless services

Philadelphia has extensive data collection capabilities and has used them both to inform the provision of homeless services, including outreach, and to evaluate programmatic initiatives.

Take innovative features and expand them

Over the years, Philadelphia has incorporated person-centered approaches such as "by-name" list, Housing First, low-barrier, and harm reduction approaches into its homeless and related services. This continues as various elements of the ERP approach have subsequently been adopted system-wide.

SOLUTIONS BASED ON EVIDENCE

Arnold Ventures (AV) is a philanthropic organization with the mission to invest in evidence-based solutions that maximize opportunities and minimize injustice. AV supported a study to identify practices and policies that promote alternatives to using punitive and enforcement-based measures as the primary responses to unsheltered homelessness. Project investigators conducted a three-day visit in spring–summer 2019 to each of nine sites for an in-person review of community-specific initiatives. The sites represent the major regions of the U.S. and include cities of different sizes as well as rural, suburban, and tribal areas and provide an array of different socioeconomic contexts and present different local housing market configurations.

- 1 William Bleier (2019). "Philly's Roadmap to Homes removes barriers to shelter, employs strategies from 'Housing First' programs." Generocity (March 29). Available at: <https://generocity.org/philly/2019/03/29/philly-was-the-first-us-city-to-implement-housing-first-but-is-it-really-working-asks-one-of-our-readers/>
- 2 Quoted in Alfred Lubrano's 4/29/19 Philadelphia Inquirer article, "For second year, outreach teams are connecting with Philly's homeless" available at <https://www.inquirer.com/news/homeless-center-city-district-philadelphia-police-project-home-20190429.html>
- 3 Philadelphia Inquirer Editorial Board (2018). "Philly deserves credit for clearing out heroin encampments, offering help." (June 1). <https://www.inquirer.com/philly/opinion/editorials/opioid-philly-kensington-camps-20180601.html>



Arnold Ventures

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