



**NATIONAL SURVEY  
OF PROGRAMS AND SERVICES  
FOR HOMELESS FAMILIES**

[www.icprwb.org](http://www.icprwb.org)

from the INSTITUTE FOR CHILDREN AND POVERTY

Massachusetts had an estimated 2,644 homeless families on a single night in 2008, with providers serving nearly twice their bed capacity over the course of the year.<sup>1</sup> This brief summarizes some of the state's public and private initiatives to assist these families.

**State Taskforce on Homelessness**

**Taskforce:** The Massachusetts Interagency Council on Homelessness and Housing (reconvened by executive order in November 2007) implements strategies and solutions to address homelessness in accordance with the state plan to end homelessness.

**Governor's Appointee:** Lieutenant Governor Timothy Murray has served as chair of the Massachusetts Interagency Council on Homelessness and Housing since 2007.



**Demographic Summary and Overview of Regional Organization**

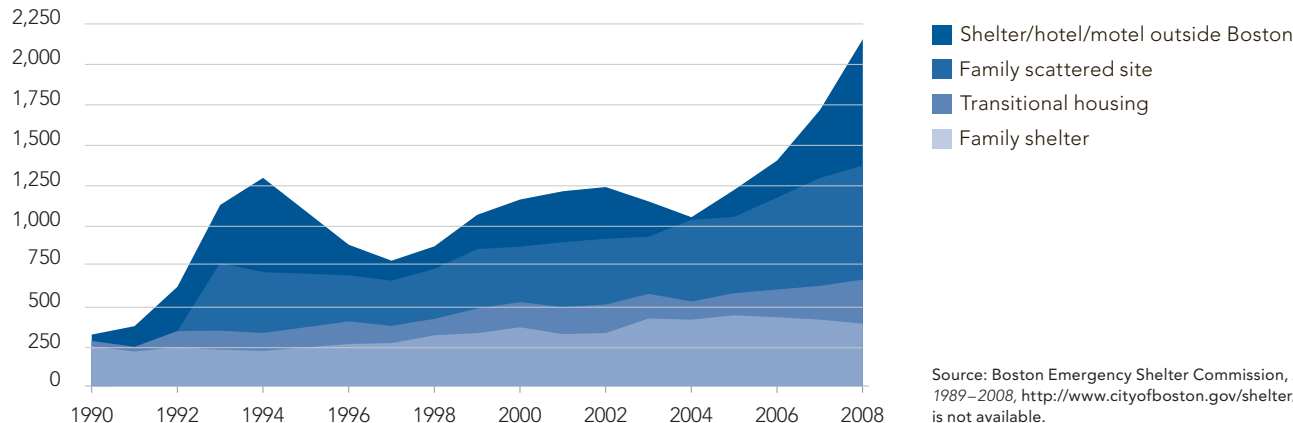
	Massachusetts	Boston	Worcester <sup>2</sup>	Springfield	Cambridge
Persons in homeless families <sup>3</sup>	7,379	2,515	705	367	127
Number of family shelter beds <sup>4</sup>	7,901	2,708	814	420	92
Persons in homeless families (per 10,000 population in families) <sup>5</sup>	32	146	23	66	64
Percent of families in poverty <sup>6</sup>	10.97%	23.65%	10.19%	34.36%	14.71%
10-Year plan date approved or implemented	2007	No plan	2007	2007	2005
10-Year plan target population	All	No plan	All	All	All
Point-in-time count frequency	Annually	Annually	Annually	Annually	Annually
Point-in-time count managing agency	Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development	City of Boston Emergency Shelter Commission	Central Massachusetts Housing Alliance	City of Springfield Office of Housing	City of Cambridge Department of Human Service Programs
Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) managing agency	Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development	City of Boston Department of Neighborhood Development	Central Massachusetts Housing Alliance	City of Springfield Office of Housing	City of Cambridge Department of Human Service Programs
Continuum of Care (CoC) lead applicant or main organizing agency	Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development	City of Boston Department of Neighborhood Development	Central Massachusetts Housing Alliance	City of Springfield Office of Housing	City of Cambridge Department of Human Service Programs

**Massachusetts Centralized Intake System and Eligibility Criteria**

Massachusetts has a right to shelter policy for homeless families.<sup>7</sup> Homeless families apply for shelter under the Emergency Assistance (EA) program through the Department of Housing and Community Development's offices throughout the state.<sup>8</sup> In addition to providing shelter, Emergency Assistance helps households retain their current housing through temporary financial assistance and connects homeless clients with subsidized or unsubsidized housing. EA is available to households with dependent children younger than 21 years old and to pregnant women.<sup>9</sup> To be eligible for shelter, a family must be homeless due to the lack of alternative housing options. Furthermore, household income cannot exceed 115% of the federal poverty line, or \$21,057 for a family of three, including income from government benefits.<sup>10</sup> Once in shelter, families must set aside 30% of income for

The *National Survey of Programs and Services for Homeless Families* is an online resource for service providers, advocates, researchers, and public policy makers working in the field of family homelessness. The Web site provides a state-by-state snapshot of the interconnections between governmental and nonprofit work to end family homelessness. For additional information on Massachusetts and other states, visit [www.icprwb.org](http://www.icprwb.org)



**Homeless Children in Boston (by shelter type and year)**

savings or debt repayment and participate in programs that promote financial self-sufficiency, including education, job training, or substance abuse counseling.<sup>11</sup>

**Boston's Homeless Census and Increase in Family Homelessness**

Since 1983, the City of Boston's Emergency Shelter Commission (ESC) has conducted a census of homeless individuals and families each December. The number of homeless children counted in Boston has increased over the past two decades, rising nearly 340% since 1988. ESC attributes this rise to decreases in federal and state housing subsidies, families staying longer in shelter, Massachusetts's high cost of living, and the federal government's emphasis on reducing chronic homelessness.<sup>12</sup>

The first decline in the number of homeless children between 1994 and 1996 is partially the result of more restrictive state shelter eligibility regulations, which forced families to live doubled-up with relatives or friends.<sup>13</sup> The second decrease in the number of families residing in motels in 2004 was due in part to the state providing one-year housing vouchers to 30% of families that lived in motels during the previous year. In following years, however, the number of persons in homeless families continued to rise. In its December 2008 count, ESC noted a 22% increase in the number of homeless families from 2007, many of whom were placed in hotels, motels, and other housing outside of Boston. ESC attributed this rise in part to the economic downturn.<sup>14</sup>

**Educational Opportunities for Homeless Children**

Horizons for Homeless Children (HHC), a non-profit organization based in Boston, has provided educational services and advocacy for young homeless children and their families throughout Massachusetts since 1988. Recognizing the need to improve early childhood outcomes for homeless children, HHC developed the Playspace program in 1990. Playspaces are safe, "kid-friendly" centers in more than 140 shelters across the state where trained volunteers engage over 2,200 homeless children each week in educational recreation activities. In 1994, HHC opened its first Community Children's Center (CCC) to provide day care for Playspace clients. These National Association for the Education of Young Children certified centers provide year-round early education designed to address the developmental needs of children ages 2 months to 6 years and break the cycle of homelessness. HHC currently operates three CCCs serving 175 children and their parents in metropolitan Boston.<sup>15</sup> A 2006 program analysis revealed increased academic scores and language skills among children participating in CCCs, relative to other homeless children.<sup>16</sup>

**Endnotes**

- <sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, *HUD's 2008 CoC Homeless Assistance Programs—Homeless Populations and Subpopulations*; U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, *AHAR Exchange Public Reports: 2008 Comprehensive Report of Sheltered Homeless Persons*.
- <sup>2</sup> Statistics for the City of Worcester include Worcester County.
- <sup>3</sup> U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, *2008 Homeless Populations and Subpopulations*.
- <sup>4</sup> U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, *HUD's 2008 CoC Homeless Assistance Programs—Housing Inventory Chart Report*.
- <sup>5</sup> U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, *2008 Homeless Populations and Subpopulations*; U.S. Census Bureau, 2006–2008 *American Community Survey 3-Year Estimates*.
- <sup>6</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, 2006–2008 *American Community Survey*.
- <sup>7</sup> United States Conference of Mayors, *Hunger and Homelessness Survey: A Status Report on Hunger and Homelessness in America's Cities: A 25-City Survey*, December 2009.
- <sup>8</sup> Until July 2009, families applied to the Department of Transitional Assistance for Emergency Assistance.
- <sup>9</sup> Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance, *106 CMR: Emergency Assistance*, Rev. February 2003.
- <sup>10</sup> United States Department of Health and Human Services, *The 2009 HHS Poverty Guidelines*, January 2009; Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance, *106 CMR: Emergency Assistance*, Rev. February 2003.
- <sup>11</sup> Massachusetts Division of Housing Stability, *Modifications to Emergency Assistance Regulation 106 CMR 309*, March 27, 2009.
- <sup>12</sup> Boston Emergency Shelter Commission, *Annual Homeless Census, December 18, 2006*; Boston Emergency Shelter Commission, *Homelessness in the City of Boston: Winter 2007–2008*.
- <sup>13</sup> Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless, *Ending Homelessness in Massachusetts: A Historical Perspective and Recommendations*, November 30, 2006; Boston Emergency Shelter Commission, *Homelessness in the City of Boston: Winter 2004–2005*.
- <sup>14</sup> Boston Emergency Shelter Commission, *Homelessness in the City of Boston: Winter 2004–2005, 2008–2009*.
- <sup>15</sup> Horizons for Homeless Children, <http://www.horizonsforhomelesschildren.org>
- <sup>16</sup> Shirley Fan-Chan, "Horizons for Homeless Children" (conference, Institute For Children and Poverty, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, January 21, 2010).