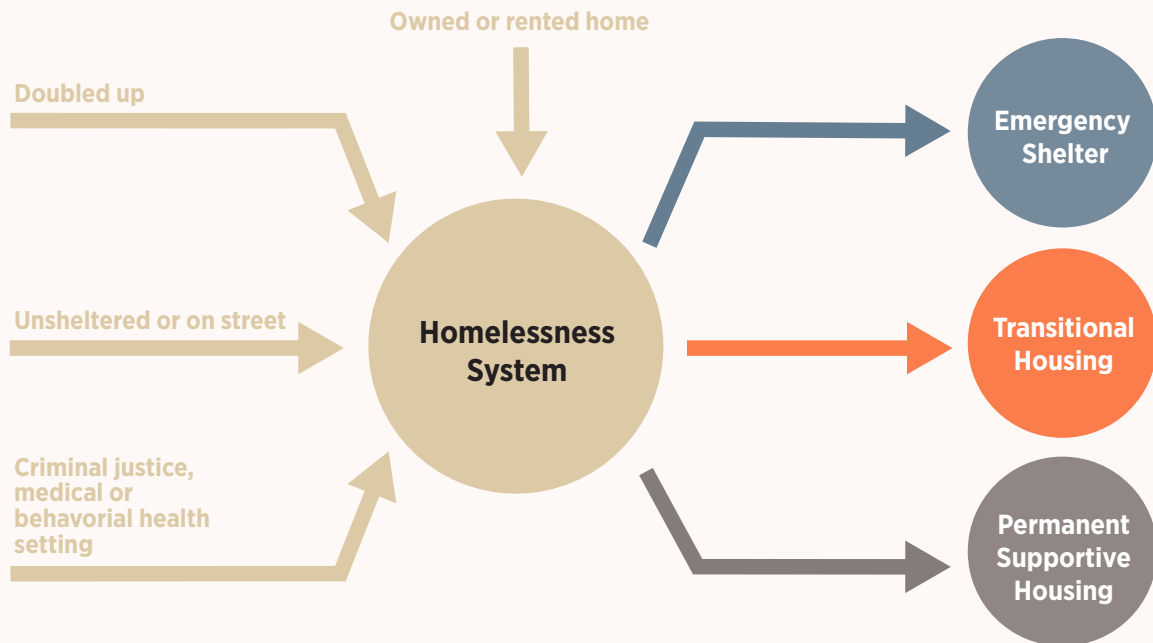


## Individuals Involved in the Allegheny County Homelessness System



August 2015



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**Allegheny County Department of Human Services**

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## GLOSSARY

### Acronyms

DHS	[Allegheny County] Department of Human Services
HMIS	Homeless Management Information System
HUD	[United States Department of] Housing and Urban Development
PIT	Point-in-Time Count
PSH	Permanent Supportive Housing
TH	Transitional Housing

### Definitions

**Homeless Episode** — For purposes of this report, re-entry into the system within 30 days of a previous exit was considered as a single homeless episode. Re-entry after more than 30 days after previous exit was counted as a new homeless episode.

### Program Definitions

*Entry into/exit from the following three program types were analyzed:*

**Emergency Shelter Services (shelter)** — Shelters provide temporary housing and support for individuals or families who are in immediate need of a place to stay. Most shelters cap their stays at 60 days and have few limitations on admission criteria (extensions beyond 60 days may be granted if a housing opportunity is imminent). Allegheny County has 18 emergency shelters (including three shelters for victims of intimate partner violence) plus a severe weather emergency shelter that serves single individuals that operates from November through March. Eleven of these shelters (277 beds) dedicate all or part of their beds to serving single individuals.

**Transitional Housing (TH)** — Transitional Housing provides temporary (maximum of two years) housing combined with supportive services designed to assist the individual/family in gaining self-sufficiency and permanent housing upon program completion. Transitional Housing programs may tailor their supports to specific sub-populations such as individuals in recovery from substance abuse, ex-offenders or veterans, and may have specific eligibility criteria that clients are required to meet prior to enrollment. Included in Transitional Housing programs are bridge housing and PennFree bridge housing programs, which follow a similar program model

**Glossary***(continued)*

but allow for a maximum length of stay of one year as opposed to two years. Allegheny County has 57 transitional housing programs, 45 of which dedicate all or part of their beds (430 beds total) to single individuals.

**Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH)** — Permanent Supportive Housing combines housing with more intensive services for those with one or more chronic disabling conditions, and does not have a limit on length of stay. Some PSH programs follow the Housing First model in which chronically homeless individuals with a permanent disability can enter the program directly from living on the street, without preconditions, while other PSH programs require that clients meet certain criteria and exhibit a commitment to the program’s principles (often called a “housing ready” model). Forty-five PSH programs are located in Allegheny County, 26 of which (625 beds) serve single individuals. Included in this category is Safe Haven, a housing first model for chronically homeless, single individuals who are unable or unwilling to participate in supportive services.

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## KEY FINDINGS

- From 2009 through 2013, the number of single adults annually accessing homelessness services increased by 18 percent (from 3,061 to 3,625). The number of individuals accessing emergency shelter services increased by eight percent, while those accessing transitional housing services increased by 36 percent and those living in permanent supportive housing increased by 89 percent.
- African American individuals were over-represented in the homelessness system by a factor of four (51 percent compared to 12 percent of the county's population as a whole). In addition, while gender is evenly divided among the general population of Allegheny County, 71 percent of individuals accessing homelessness services were male.
- Approximately 20 percent of individuals who accessed homelessness services from 2009 through 2013 came from unsheltered situations or places not meant for human habitation, such as the streets. Although these individuals primarily entered emergency shelters, increasing numbers directly accessed Permanent Supportive Housing.
- Emergency shelter entrants generally followed one of two paths after entering the homelessness system: periods of brief but recurring shelter enrollments, typically over the course of two months or less, or single shelter stays of one night without repeated entry or connection to other housing services. In 2013, 59 percent of the 2,437 individuals accessing emergency shelter services did so multiple times, accounting for 7,710 unique enrollments in the course of the year. Of the 2009 first-entry cohort that accessed emergency shelter, 40 percent exited after just five days; half exited within two weeks. Only 54 individuals, or about five percent of the shelter entry cohort, moved on to transitional or permanent supportive housing during their initial episode of homelessness.
- Approximately one-third of individuals (523) in the 2009 first-entry cohort returned to the system within two years of exiting their first placement, on average returning between six and seven months following initial exit. A smaller percentage of individuals re-entered the system following participation in transitional or permanent supportive housing (23 percent and seven percent, respectively) than those who exited shelter (35 percent).

## INTRODUCTION

In 2014, the Allegheny County Department of Human Services (DHS) conducted a review of its homelessness services system as a first step in planning for and promoting comprehensive strategies for reducing homelessness. The review included a variety of components, including a qualitative review of the experience of homelessness from the client perspective and an analysis of Allegheny County's Point-in-Time (PIT) count of individuals and families experiencing homelessness. Data were analyzed to identify client demographic characteristics as well as service entry and exit trends. This report provides information about the population of Allegheny County adults experiencing a housing crisis from 2009 through 2013, with an in-depth focus on the 2009 entry cohort. A report about families accessing the homelessness system is also available.

## METHODOLOGY

### Data Sources

Allegheny County's Homeless Management Information System (HMIS). Homeless Management Information System is an information system used to collect client-level data about all adults and children entering Allegheny County's homelessness system. These data are used to measure program performance, allocate funding, coordinate services, conduct service reviews and track client progress across the array of services available in the system. Some information (e.g., veteran status, income or disability) is self-reported, although Transitional Housing (TH) and Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) programs typically require verification of these data. Additional data about bed capacity were available in the Allegheny County Housing Inventory Chart.

### Data Warehouse

The Department of Human Services Data Warehouse is a central repository of social services data, which allows DHS to track and report client demographic and service data across its program offices and beyond. The Data Warehouse contains approximately 1.25 billion records for more than one million distinct clients. It contains data from 29 data sources (internal and external to DHS) including child welfare, behavior health, school systems, family support centers, criminal justice system and public benefits.



### Target Population

This report focuses on single individuals, age 18 and older, who were unaccompanied by a spouse/partner or children.

### DEMOGRAPHICS OF INDIVIDUALS

In 2013, 3,625 single individuals accessed homelessness services (individuals account for about 60 percent of the total population accessing the homelessness services system). These individuals tended to be men ages 45 through 54 who accessed shelter services. An additional 393 individuals accessed services at one of three domestic violence shelters in the county, but — due to safety concerns — client-level data for these individuals are not recorded in HMIS, so these individuals were not included in the analysis.

African Americans accounted for slightly more than half of the individuals who accessed services, an over-representation by a factor of four when compared to the general population of Allegheny County. Of the single individuals experiencing a housing crisis, approximately one in 10 was a veteran, one in 10 was a survivor of intimate partner violence, and one in four had a permanent physical or mental health disability.

Although the number of adults served in the homelessness services system increased by more than 550 from 2009 through 2013<sup>1</sup>, their overall demographic characteristics have remained relatively constant over the five-year period, with individuals ages 55 through 64 accounting for the largest increase since 2009. **Table 1**, on page 4, details the gender, race and age of individuals who accessed services during this five-year period.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> An increase in the number of clients is largely attributable to an increase in system capacity, particularly in permanent supportive housing services, rather than an overall increase in the number of adults experiencing homelessness in Allegheny County.

<sup>2</sup> Annual figures are unduplicated, but when enrollments extend for more than one year, then client counts are duplicated across multiple years.

**TABLE 1: Demographics of Homeless Individuals, 2009 through 2013**

<sup>3</sup> Rates for the Allegheny County population are taken from the 2010 Census.

CATEGORIES	DESCRIPTION	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	ALLEGHENY COUNTY <sup>3</sup>
GENDER	MALE	2,222 73%	2,241 70%	2,313 71%	2,304 70%	2,560 71%	462,137 47%
	FEMALE	839 27%	950 30%	934 29%	967 30%	1,065 29%	519,548 53%
RACE	AFRICAN AMERICAN	1,354 44%	1,513 47%	1,618 50%	1,650 50%	1,856 51%	116,309 12%
	WHITE	901 29%	1,043 33%	1,194 37%	1,236 38%	1,558 43%	822,357 84%
	OTHER	25 1%	52 2%	90 3%	82 3%	94 3%	43,019 4%
	NO DATA	781 26%	583 18%	345 11%	303 9%	117 3%	0 0%
AGE	18-24	355 12%	468 15%	474 15%	465 14%	410 11%	123,613 13%
	25-34	445 15%	482 15%	494 15%	520 16%	660 18%	157,549 16%
	35-44	682 22%	652 20%	610 19%	626 19%	643 18%	145,894 15%
	45-54	1,079 35%	1,047 33%	1,064 33%	989 30%	1,056 29%	186,865 19%
	55-64	416 14%	470 15%	514 16%	576 18%	750 21%	162,705 17%
	65+	84 3%	72 2%	91 3%	95 3%	106 3%	205,059 21%
<b>Total</b>		<b>3,061</b>	<b>3,191</b>	<b>3,247</b>	<b>3,271</b>	<b>3,625</b>	<b>981,685</b>

Note: Due to rounding, percentages may not total 100%.

In addition to the over-representation of African Americans in the homeless population compared to the total adult population of Allegheny County, men are also over-represented by more than 20 percent, and individuals ages 45 through 54 are over-represented by approximately 10 percent. An interesting finding is that the percentage of elderly (65 and older) in the homelessness system (three percent) is significantly lower than their percentage of the county’s population (21 percent). This may be a reflection of the rich system of supports in place for seniors in Allegheny County.

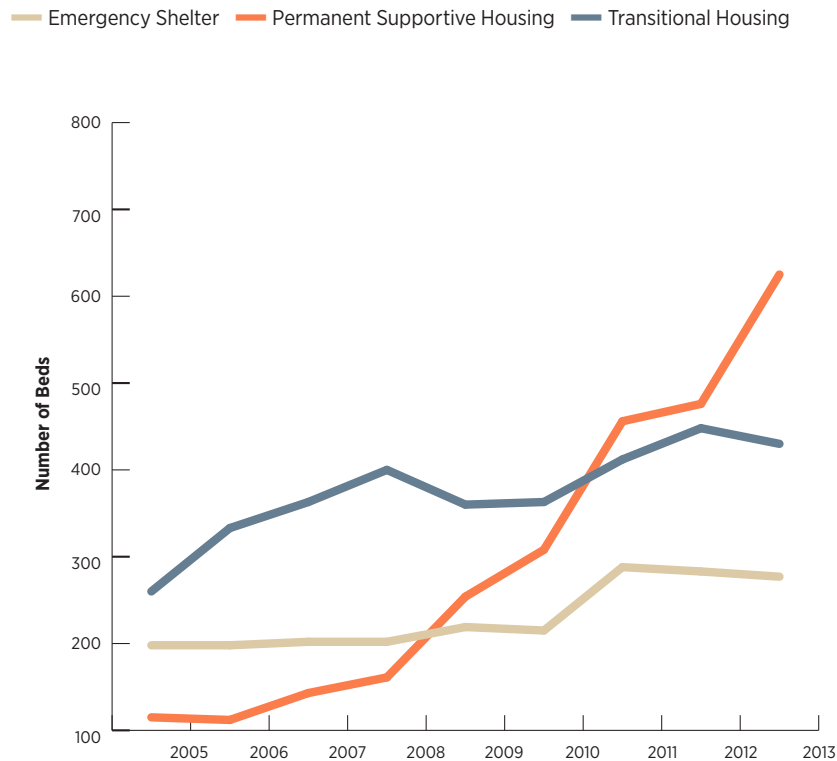
**SERVICE USAGE DYNAMICS**

Since 2005, system capacity for individuals increased across all service types, with the largest increase occurring in PSH, with more than 500 new PSH beds available to adults. This increase in system capacity was primarily the result of increased allocations through competitive U.S.

Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Continuum of Care grants. The increase in PSH beds is reflective of both national and local policy to prevent and reduce homelessness whenever possible and to provide intensive supports and housing to the most vulnerable individuals who encounter a housing crisis. TH programs have also increased, but to a lesser degree, with 170 beds added to the system since 2005.

<sup>4</sup> Data are from the Allegheny County Housing Inventory Chart. Bed capacity excludes seasonal and overflow beds, Safe Haven beds, and HPRP-funded beds available during 2009 - 2012.

**FIGURE 1: Individual Bed Capacity by Program Type, 2005 through 2013<sup>4</sup>**



Although there are fewer shelter beds than the other program types, they serve by far the largest number of individuals, due to the short length of stay (maximum of 60 days), ease of access and low barriers to entry, which result in rapid turnover (see **Table 2**, below). A shelter bed is utilized, on average, by eight different individuals each year; in comparison, each bed in TH and PSH is utilized by one individual per year.

<sup>5</sup> Figures are duplicated in instances where individuals accessed multiple service types in a given year.

**TABLE 2: Individuals Accessing Homelessness Services, by Service Type, 2009 through 2013<sup>5</sup>**

SERVICE TYPE	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Emergency Shelter	2,247	2,353	2,343	2,129	2,437
Transitional Housing	636	624	616	738	863
Permanent Supportive Housing	319	349	453	550	603
<b>Unduplicated Total</b>	<b>3,061</b>	<b>3,191</b>	<b>3,247</b>	<b>3,271</b>	<b>3,625</b>

## 2009 FIRST-ENTRY COHORT

Examining how individuals enter the homelessness services system and the type of service they access after experiencing homelessness for the first time can inform system planning and determine if Allegheny County's homeless system is responsive to the needs of people who are experiencing a housing crisis. It is also an important measure of need as it excludes individuals who have accessed multiple services over time, or who have experienced long periods of enrollment in the system.

One way to describe when, where and for how long people access services is to select an entry cohort and follow its involvement in the system over time. For this examination, we selected the cohort of individuals who entered the system for the first time in 2009. Selecting 2009 allowed us, in most instances, to track their movement for two years following program exit.

The demographics of the first-entry cohort closely resembled the overall homeless population served in 2009. The first-time population of individuals accessing the system tended to be slightly younger than the overall homeless population served in that year, although race and gender characteristics displayed no significant variation. Nine percent had a permanent mental or physical disability, while seven percent were veterans.

**TABLE 3: Demographics of 2009 First-Entry Cohort**

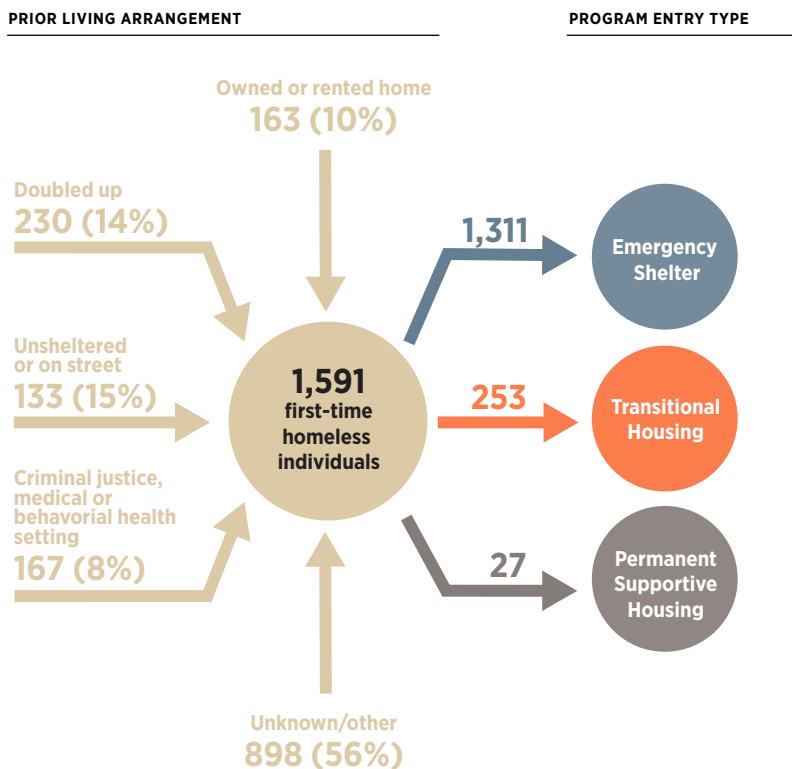
CATEGORIES	DESCRIPTION	COUNT (RATE)
SEX	Male	1,146 (72%)
	Female	445 (28%)
RACE	African American	653 (41%)
	White	459 (29%)
	Other	16 (1%)
	No Data	463 (29%)
AGE	18-24	243 (16%)
	25-34	279 (17%)
	35-44	384 (24%)
	45-54	463 (29%)
	55-64	181 (11%)
	65+	41 (3%)
<b>Total</b>		<b>1,591</b>

**Living Situation Prior to System Entry**

Figure 2 below outlines the living arrangement for this entry cohort prior to entering the homelessness services system for the first time. The information is not available for more than half of first-time entrants, primarily due to the fact that this information was only collected for about half of those entering emergency shelter. However, prior living situations for those for whom information is known were somewhat evenly distributed among own home, doubled-up situation, living on the street or unsheltered, and institutional setting (including a hospital, mental health setting or criminal justice facility). A similar pattern emerges when looking at living situation prior to system entry over a five-year period, although improvements in data quality have reduced the number of clients for whom information about prior living arrangement is unknown.

Of particular note is that first-time homeless individuals entering TH tended to enter from a criminal justice, medical or behavioral health setting (61 percent of entries) and tended to stay between six and nine months, which is slightly less than the average length of stay in this service type. This can be partially attributed to the admission criteria of a number of TH programs, which provide specialized treatment and support to individuals with a substance use diagnosis, or to ex-offenders leaving a criminal justice setting. This program design often utilizes specialized admittance criteria that allow clients to enter a homelessness service program immediately following exit from a substance use treatment facility or other institutional setting.

**FIGURE 2: Prior Living Arrangement and First Point of Entry for 2009 Entry Cohort**



### Point of Entry

In 2009, 1,591 individuals entered the system for the first time; 1,311 (82 percent) entered shelter, 253 (16 percent) entered directly into TH, and 27 (two percent) entered PSH as their first point of access to the system.

To put this into context, we examined the first point of entry for all individuals entering the system for the first time from 2009 through 2013. As would be expected, most individuals (79 percent) first entered the system by accessing shelter.<sup>6</sup> Approximately four percent of all first-time homeless individuals entered PSH as their point of entry, a percentage that is slowly rising as more programs adopt a “housing first” practice to better address chronic homelessness. Seventeen percent entered the system by first accessing TH, which may in part be driven by programs designed for specific sub-populations such as ex-offenders or individuals in recovery from substance abuse. Clients in TH and PSH typically accounted for a single enrollment during the year. Clients in shelter, however, were much more likely to experience multiple entries and exits.

Recent changes to federal law have prompted Allegheny County to design and implement a coordinated intake and assessment system. Assessments and referrals will be made centrally from DHS to a wide array of providers, programs and services, rather than each agency operating its own waiting list and intake process. This coordinated entry and referral process is designed to simplify the process of accessing services and reduce barriers to housing supports; it will also provide insight into the number of unserved individuals and other gaps in services, which to date has not been available. The introduction of a vulnerability assessment will also provide homeless individuals with referrals to a specific service type based on their needs rather than simply based on bed availability.

### Length of Stay and Movement within the System

Tracking a client’s movement and patterns of enrollment through the homelessness services system can help identify gaps in service and provide insight regarding service access and length of stay across each service type. The following figures show the exit outcomes for individuals in the 2009 first-entry cohort over time. Each individual could follow one of three paths following initial enrollment:

- continued enrollment in the same service type
- exit from system
- continued involvement in the system but in another service type

For shelter clients, these placements would include either TH or PSH, and for TH clients the other program placements would include either shelter or PSH. These outcomes were charted over time for the 2009 first-entry cohort by type of service initially accessed.

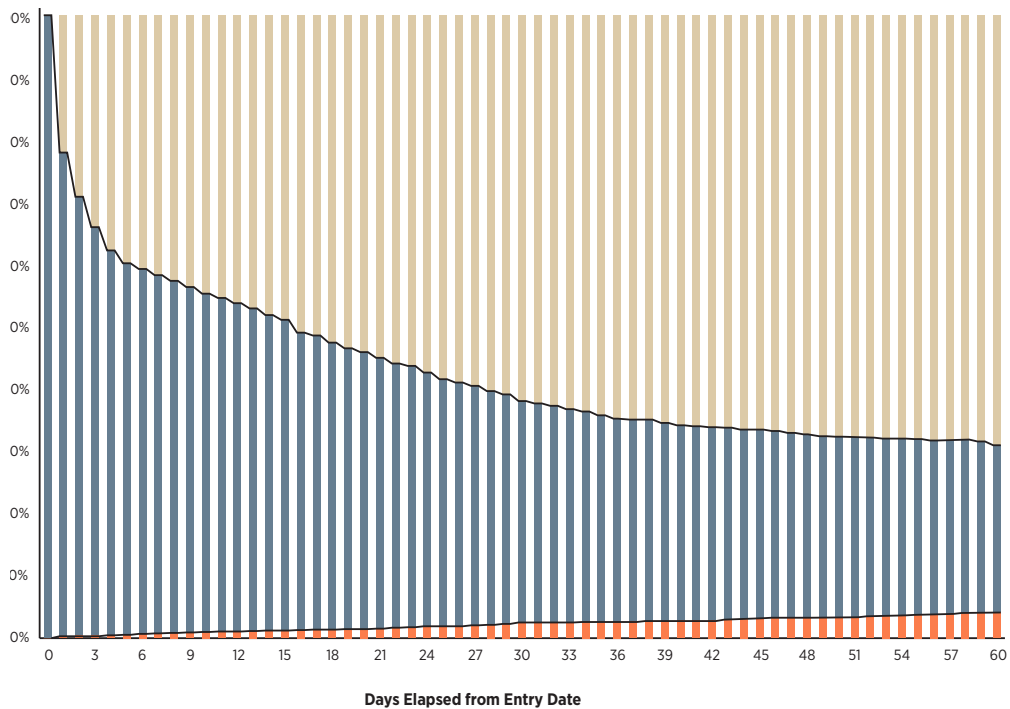
<sup>6</sup> Data are from the Allegheny County Housing Inventory Chart. Bed capacity excludes seasonal and overflow beds, Safe Haven beds and HPRP-funded beds available from 2009 through 2012.

### Emergency Shelter

Shelter entrants generally followed one of two paths after entering the homelessness system: periods of brief but recurring shelter enrollments, typically over the course of two months or less, or single shelter stays of one night without repeated entry or connection to other housing services. As the figure below illustrates, 40 percent exited the system after just five days of shelter enrollment, and half of the first entry cohort accessing shelter as the point of system entry exited the system within two weeks of enrollment. Of those accessing shelter as a first point of entry, just 54 individuals, or less than five percent of the shelter entry cohort, moved on to TH or PSH from shelter during their initial episode of homelessness.

**FIGURE 3: 2009 First-Entry Cohort Exit Outcomes and Length of Stay (in Days), Emergency Shelter Entrants**

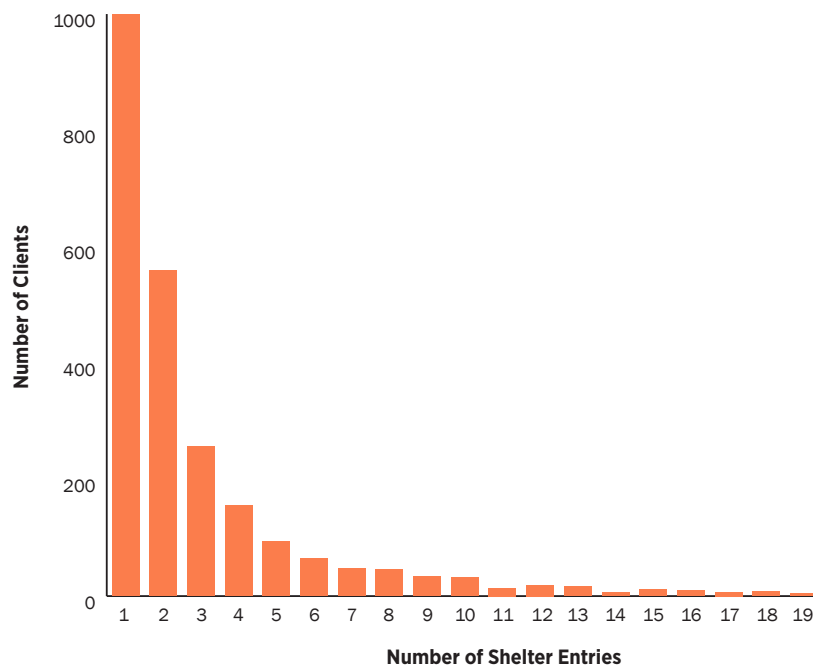
■ System Exit ■ Continued Service Enrollment ■ Moved to TH or PHS



More than half (827 or 63 percent) of the individuals accessing shelter as a first point of entry experienced multiple enrollments in shelter services (counted as a single homeless episode). This pattern of moving in and out of shelter over a brief period of time was common. In 2013, for example, 59 percent of clients accessing shelter did so multiple times, accounting for 7,710 unique enrollments. **Figure 4**, below, displays the number of unique shelter entries for clients who accessed shelter in 2013.

<sup>7</sup> Figure includes clients who accessed the Severe Weather Emergency Shelter, which serves adults from November through March of each year when the temperature drops below 25 degrees or when blizzard conditions occur.

**FIGURE 4: Frequency of Shelter Entries for Individuals Accessing Emergency Shelter During 2013<sup>7</sup>**



Client-level administrative data from HMIS indicate that the vast majority of clients with multiple shelter enrollments entered shelter from a place not meant for human habitation, such as on the streets, in a vehicle or abandoned building, or in a bus or train station.

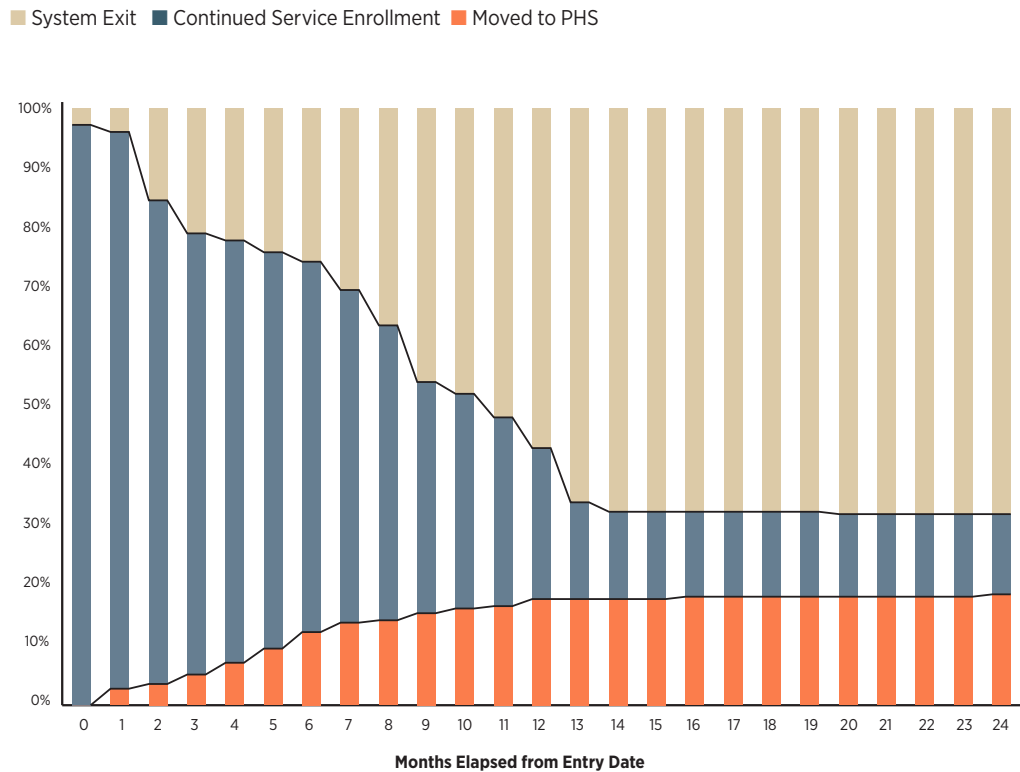
**Transitional Housing**

Adults entering TH as a first placement tended to stay for far shorter periods of time than the maximum length of stay allowed by each program type. Clients in the 12-month bridge and PennFree bridge housing programs stayed an average of nine months, while clients in the 24-month TH programs stayed an average of 14 months.

Nearly 20 percent moved to another program following enrollment: 22 individuals exited TH and entered shelter, while 14 entered a higher level of service in PSH. An additional 11 individuals accessed a different TH program through another provider.



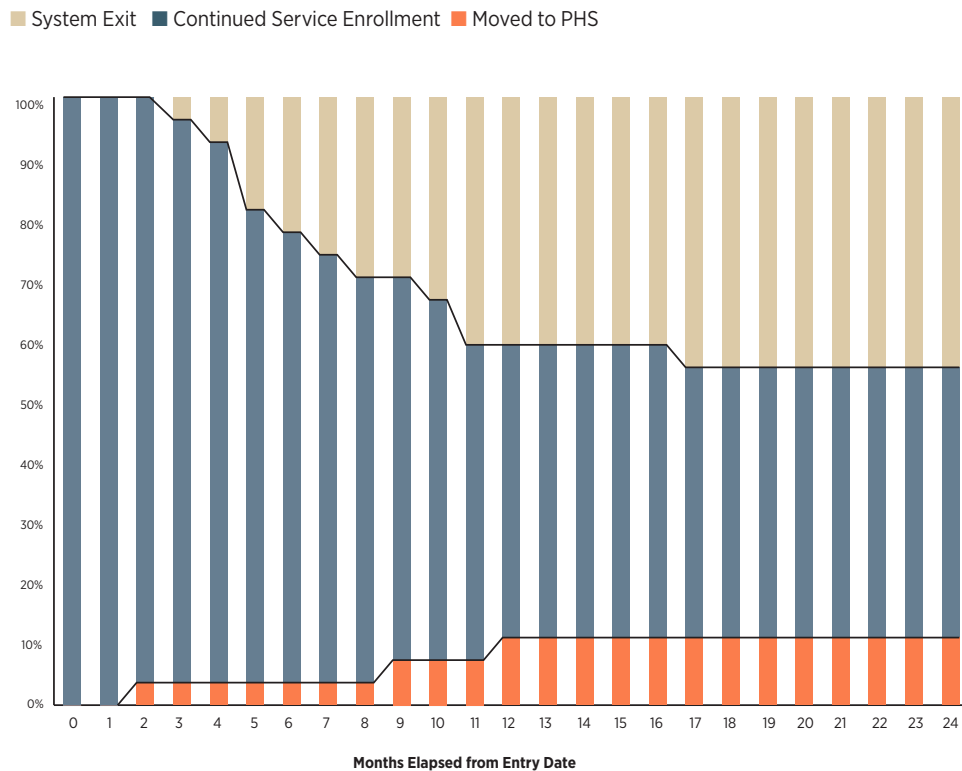
**FIGURE 5: 2009 First-Entry Cohort Exit Outcomes and Length of Stay (in Months), TH and Bridge Housing Entrants**



**Permanent Supportive Housing**

Individuals accessing PSH as a point of first entry to the homelessness system in this entry cohort experienced slightly shorter stays than the general population enrolled in PSH. Three of the individuals in this entry cohort moved from PSH to a lower, less intensive service type (either shelter or TH) without gaps in service. Although moving to a lower level of care is uncommon among individuals accessing PSH, it may occur when a client is terminated from a program or cannot verify eligibility for a program.

**FIGURE 6: 2009 First-Entry Cohort Exit Outcomes and Length of Stay (in Months), PSH Entrants (n = 27)**



One key finding of this analysis is that, while the homelessness services system has traditionally been construed as a system of progressive levels of engagement and supports that individuals move through after completion of a previous “step” of service, in practice this is not the pattern of system involvement that most individuals experience. Given the various service types within the system, one might expect a person in a housing crisis to first access shelter, and then receive additional supports in TH or PSH as vacancies become available in programs that offer higher levels of care. A national and local priority is to interrupt this progression of services and provide a single, targeted, best-fit intervention based on the individual’s needs and risks. This analysis shows that this is indeed occurring, as the overwhelming majority of individuals access only one service type within the system, often in shelter settings.

**Re-Entry**

Re-entry is an important measure of the effectiveness of a system. Often, multiple enrollments over a short period of time are part of a single homeless episode. For purposes of this report, re-entry into a program within the system (primarily occurring in shelter) within 30 days of exit from a previous entry is considered as a single episode. Re-entry after more than 30 days have elapsed from exit is counted as a new homeless episode.

**Table 4** outlines the service types through which individuals in the 2009 first-entry cohort re-entered the system as part of a new homeless episode. Approximately one-third of individuals (523) in this entry cohort experienced system re-entry within two years of exiting their first homeless placement, on average returning to the system between six and seven months of initial exit. A smaller percentage of individuals re-entered the system following participation in TH or PSH (23 percent and seven percent, respectively) than those who exited shelter (35 percent). Of particular note, those who experienced re-entry after their initial stay in TH or PSH on average only stayed two-and-a-half months in that initial placement (compared to more than a year for most TH or PSH placements). These short stays may not have allowed sufficient time for stabilization of the housing crisis.

**TABLE 4: System Re-Entry by Program Type at Entry**

SERVICE TYPE AT INITIAL ENTRY	COUNT OF CLIENTS IN ENTRY COHORT	COUNT OF CLIENTS RE-ENTERING SYSTEM	PROGRAM TYPE AT RE-ENTRY		
			EMERGENCY SHELTER	TRANSITIONAL HOUSING	PERMANENT SUPPORTIVE HOUSING
Emergency Shelter	1,311	462 (35%)	384 (83%)	64 (14%)	14 (3%)
Transitional Housing	253	59 (23%)	22 (37%)	27 (46%)	10 (17%)
Permanent Supportive Housing	27	2 (7%)	1 (50%)	1 (50%)	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,591</b>	<b>523 (33%)</b>	<b>407 (78%)</b>	<b>92 (17%)</b>	<b>24 (5%)</b>

### Pre- and Post-Entry Service Involvement

**Figure 7**, on page 14, shows initial involvement in service systems by the 2009 entry cohort prior to first entry and following first entry into the system. This temporal analysis examines first involvement in other service systems relative to first entry in the homelessness services system more than one year before accessing homelessness services for the first time, one year or less prior to first enrollment, within one year following enrollment, and more than one year following enrollment in the homelessness services system for the first time. Individuals accessing PSH as a first point of entry generally had the highest rates of system involvement, both before and after accessing the system. Clients across all program entry types in the entry cohort had high levels of past involvement in the Allegheny County Jail and the mental health and drug and alcohol treatment systems.

Short lengths of stay in all service types, especially shelters, limits the opportunity for providers to connect clients to mainstream supportive services and other human service systems. Recognizing that most individuals access services over short time frames highlights the importance of strengthening linkages between homeless providers and other mainstream services in order to improve engagement and referral to other supportive services. Further utilizing integrated client data will also give providers important tools necessary to serve homeless clients in a holistic manner.

**FIGURE 7: First Service Involvement for 2009 First-Entry Cohort, Relative to First Entry**

