



HOMELESSNESS & HOUSING NEEDS ASSESSMENT FOR TOMPKINS COUNTY

A REVIEW OF DATA, OPPORTUNITIES, AND
BARRIERS, SUMMARY REPORT

*PREPARED FOR: Human Services Coalition of Tompkins County
MARCH 9, 2022*

Prepared by:
LISA HORN, OWNER/PRESIDENT
HORN RESEARCH LLC

PO BOX 148 SLATERVILLE SPRINGS, NY 14881 | LISA @HORNRESEARCH.COM | 607-316-2748
WWW.HORNRESEARCH.COM

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	3
Executive Summary.....	4
Rates of Homelessness	4
Resources and Challenges.....	4
Opportunities.....	5
Introduction	6
Housing Continuum	6
Methodology.....	6
Report Details	6
Rates of Homelessness and System Usage: Comparative Data.....	7
Gap Analysis.....	9
County HMIS Performance Trend Analysis.....	10
Population Analysis.....	12
Types of Homelessness.....	12
Demographic Analysis.....	12
Encampments	14
Couch-Surfers.....	16
Emergency Shelter	18
Transitional Housing	22
Permanent Supportive Housing.....	25
Rapid Re-Housing.....	28
Subsidized Housing	31
Affordable Housing	32
Support Services	34
Opportunities.....	35
Conclusion.....	37
Appendix A. Interview Guides.....	38
Stakeholders	38
People with Lived Experience	39
Appendix B. List of Comparative CoCs.....	40
Appendix C. Couch-Surfer Estimate and Methodology: Census Data	41
Appendix D. Vacancy Rates by Rates of Homelessness.....	42

Acknowledgements

Horn Research would like to thank the many stakeholders and individuals who shared their thoughts and feedback for this assessment. Without their generous help, this project would not be possible. Special thanks goes to Liddy Barger, from the Human Services Coalition, for her support and patience over the course of the project.

Executive Summary

In the fall of 2021, the Human Services Coalition of Tompkins County contracted with Horn Research to analyze the homeless and housing system in the NY-510 (Ithaca/Tompkins County) Continuum of Care (CoC). The project was designed to assess the overall need for housing for unhoused individuals in Tompkins County, and the types of housing and support services most suited to the need.

Rates of Homelessness

Comparative data show that Tompkins County has a high rate of homelessness per capita than other CoCs in the state. Data from the homeless management information system (HMIS) indicate the county has had increasing difficulty moving homeless households to permanent destinations. In addition, more people are cycling in and out of homelessness than in the past. These challenges are most pronounced for adult-only households. Overall, households with children generally fare better within the homelessness system, exiting more quickly to permanent destinations and returning to homelessness less often. Race, ethnicity, and age seem to be related to the type of homelessness experienced, the path out of homelessness, and the likelihood of returning to homelessness.

Resources and Challenges

Despite having a rich and robust human services community, the assessment found that Tompkins County has deficits along the housing continuum. The emergency shelter in Tompkins County is insufficiently sized and structured to meet the needs of all the unhoused people in the county. The bulk of people seeking emergency shelter are housed in local motel rooms throughout the year, leaving them isolated from support services. A significant portion of people exiting the shelter and motels return to homelessness, particularly those who exit to temporary destinations.

*I JUST WANT TO GET INTO HOUSING
AND GET A JOB. THAT'S ALL I WANT.*

The county is also home to a sizable population of people who are either living in encampments or couch-surfing. People living in the encampments are often either resistant to using the emergency shelter or disallowed from receiving services. Qualitative information from young couch-surfers indicate they have a lack of knowledge of resources and are also resistant to utilizing the emergency shelter.

The assessment found that both transitional housing and permanent supportive housing (PSH) in the county housing is effective at disrupting homelessness in Tompkins County. Despite these successes, the assessment found that the county has an insufficient number of transitional and permanent supportive beds to meet the need.

The rapid rehousing program (RRH) has offered assistance to less vulnerable households who likely would not be eligible for other supportive housing services. Households that are currently homeless could use additional support finding housing in conjunction with receiving RRH funding. In addition, increasing availability of affordable housing could increase the impact of RRH overall.

Housing subsidies and public housing are in short supply in the county. The wait time for receiving a housing choice voucher or gaining access to public housing is more than two years. In addition to the wait for a voucher, stakeholders indicated the quality and availability of housing accepting subsidies is limited. People with lived experience shared that the process for accessing and keeping subsidies can be difficult to manage.

The county has a lack of available, affordable permanent housing which contributes to long lengths of stay in the shelter, and frequent returns to homelessness. Low vacancy rates and high rent costs are a fundamental barrier in moving people from homelessness to housing.

THERE IS NOT ENOUGH AFFORDABLE HOUSING HERE, YET LUXURY APARTMENTS SIT EMPTY.

Opportunities

There are several possible approaches the county could take to successfully address homelessness.

- Creating a new low-threshold shelter, or shifting the current shelter to a low-barrier shelter, could provide a bridge for people living in the encampments to access permanent housing.
- In the 2016 Housing Strategy, the county identified a need for 100 single room only (SRO) beds. To date, only four SROs have been built. Investing in the creation of SROs, or other similar type of housing, could address the needs of a large number of the currently homeless individuals and households in the county.
- There is potentially a large population of people who are precariously sheltered, and are not effectively being served by the current homeless and housing system. Outreach to young people and people of color, in particular, to identify those most at risk for homelessness, or in unsafe living conditions, could prevent longer-term, negative outcomes.
- Some navigational support is provided to homeless households by volunteers, and other community service providers, but intentional, funded navigator positions coupled with coordinated outreach could better serve clients in need. In addition, providing intensive case management support and housing assistance to individuals in the emergency shelter may address the cyclical homelessness common to the population.
- Recently added PSH has offered housing, and hope, to the county's unhoused population. Additional PSH could be helpful, particularly with support focusing on mental health, trauma, and other physical health conditions. Increasing the capacity of local housing and service providers will be necessary to increase PSH.
- The creation of additional, affordable housing units is vital to disrupt the homelessness cycle.

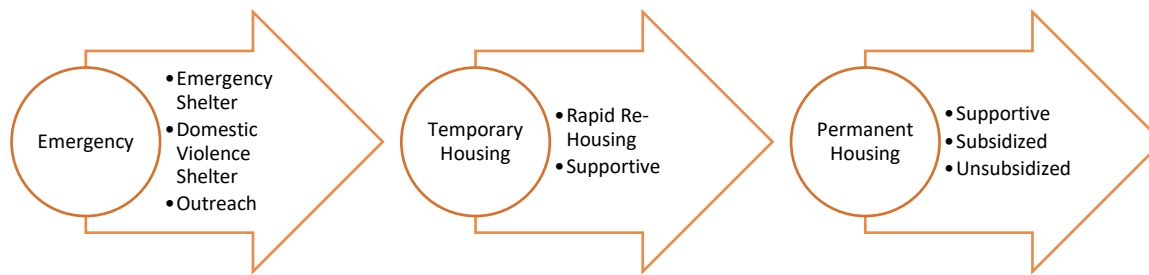
Introduction

In the fall of 2021, the Human Services Coalition of Tompkins County contracted with Horn Research to analyze the homeless and housing system in the NY-510 (Ithaca/Tompkins County) Continuum of Care (CoC). The project was structured to assess the overall need for housing for unhoused individuals in Tompkins County, and the types of housing and support services most suited to the need.

Housing Continuum

The CoC system is designed to promote community-wide commitment to the goal of ending homelessness. To that end, the CoC plans for, and provides, housing resources through overseeing the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS), and submitting an application for CoC program funding through HUD's annual Program Competition.

The housing continuum reaches from homeless to housed, and includes several types of housing including emergency shelter, supportive housing, and subsidized and unsubsidized housing. Tompkins County has programs and organizations providing housing and services along the entire continuum.



The primary goal of this assessment is to identify the gaps and needs within the housing system, and to identify the types of housing and programs necessary to end homelessness.

Methodology

Horn Research engaged a mixed-method approach for the assessment. A thorough analysis of available quantitative data was conducted, including a review of information from Tompkins County's HMIS, the Point in Time (PIT) counts, the Housing Inventory Count (HIC), Annual Performance Reports (APR), System Performance Measures (SPM), Census data, and other community assessments. The most recent data available was used for the report¹. Qualitative data was collected from community stakeholders (N=11, referred to as "stakeholders" in the report), and people with lived experience, including those who were currently and recently houseless (N=18, referred to as "interview participants" in the report.) Interviews were conducted using semi-structured interview guides (Appendix A). Interview participants with lived experience were offered an incentive of \$25 in appreciation for their time and feedback.

Report Details

Tompkins County's CoC is uncommon in that it covers a single county, is relatively small in population, has both rural and urban/suburban areas, and is home to a large population of college students. Despite the county's unique CoC population, other CoCs were examined and compared to Tompkins County's to provide perspective on the county's strengths and weaknesses. The comparative CoCs were selected

¹ HMIS: FY2020 (10/01/2019 - 09/30/2020), PIT: January, 2020, HIC: 2020, APR: FY2020 (10/01/2019 - 09/30/2020), SPM: FY2020 (10/01/2019 - 09/30/2020)

because they were either within the same geographic region, or were similar in population size or geographic type. The list of comparison CoCs is found in Appendix B.

The report begins with an overarching review of homelessness and system usage statistics, including a system gap analysis. The following sections are structured to reflect the continuum of housing in the county: unsheltered, emergency shelter (ES), transitional housing (TH), permanent supportive housing (PSH), subsidized housing, and affordable housing. Each point along the continuum is described through an analysis of available quantitative data and contextual information from stakeholders and interview participants on the gaps, needs, and barriers in the housing system. Where possible, demographic details are explored to help identify underserved populations.

Rates of Homelessness and System Usage: Comparative Data

One way of understanding the extent of homelessness in Tompkins County is to compare data with other communities. Rates of homelessness, length of stay in emergency shelter, and returns to homelessness, are all key indicators to consider when analyzing the county’s homelessness landscape.

Rates of Homelessness

The number of homeless people can be found in two data sources: the number of people counted in the PIT, which offers a view of how many people are homeless at any given time, and the number of people in the HMIS, which provides the year-round total number of people who were homeless.

The most meaningful way to compare the number of homeless people is in relation to the general population. Homelessness rates are generally presented as the number of people who are homeless out of every 10,000 people in the population.

Tompkins County has the third highest rate of homelessness per 10,000 population of comparable and surrounding CoCs using both the PIT and HMIS data sources². For the PIT, Tompkins County had a rate of 12.6 homeless people per 10,000 total population. Only NY-519 (Columbia and Greene Counties) and NY-608 (Kingston/Ulster County) had higher rates of homelessness based on the PIT. NY-519 is largely rural, but has a total population similar to Tompkins’ NY-510. NY-608 has a significantly larger population, but is similar to Tompkins in that it has an urban center surrounded by rural areas and is a single county CoC.

The homelessness rate of all people served by emergency shelter and transitional housing throughout the year in Tompkins County was 54.5 per 10,000 population³. NY-505 (Syracuse, Auburn/Onondaga, Oswego, Cayuga Counties) and NY-608 (Kingston/Ulster County) were the only comparative CoCs with similar or higher rates of total homeless people.

CoC	Point in Time
NY-608	24.1
NY-519	15.5
NY-510	12.6
NY-513	11.5
NY-505	9.2
NY-523	8.4
NY-501	8.3
NY-511	7.1
NY-518	6.4
NY-520	4.6
CoC	Year Round All Served by ES, SH, TH
NY-608	55.1
NY-510	54.5
NY-505	54.5
NY-511	38.2
NY-501	33.3
NY-513	31.3
NY-523	28.3
NY-519	24.3
NY-518	20.8
NY-520	18.4

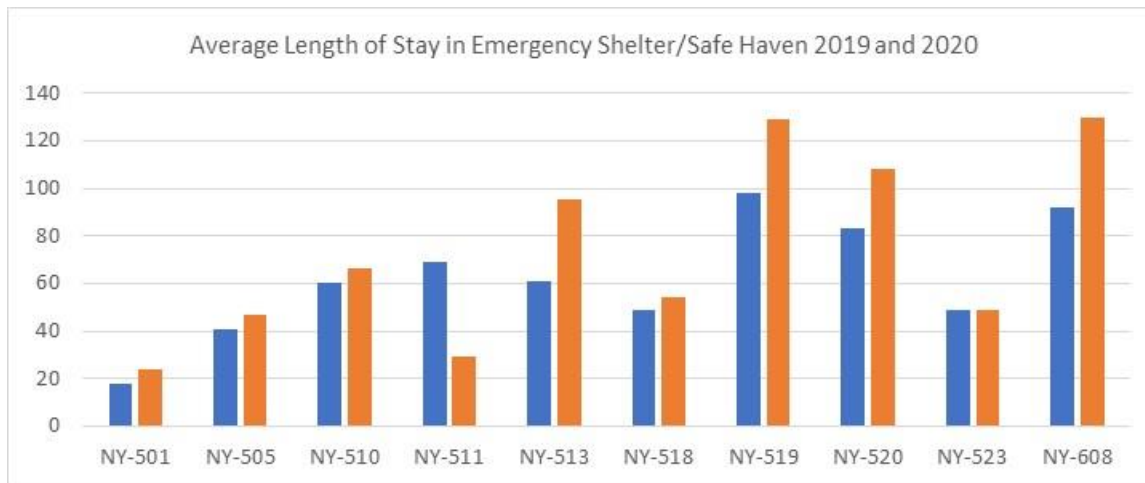
Length of Stay

Ideally, stays in emergency shelter will be brief and infrequent. Examining the average length of stay in emergency shelter can give an indication of how well the homeless system is working. According to HUD

² The rates were calculated using the 2020 Decennial Redistricting data for population size and HUD PIT data for 2020

³ HUD SPM 3, 2020

data, Tompkins County’s length of stay is much lower than most of the comparable CoCs.⁴ Tompkins County’s average length of stay in emergency shelter in 2020 was 66 days, up slightly from the 2019’s 60 days.



Returns to Homelessness

Returns to homelessness is the extent to which people who have exited homelessness to a permanent destination become homelessness again. Return to homelessness is an important indicator as it helps communities understand whether additional support may be needed for people exiting homelessness.

Tompkins County data show that 32% of people who had exited to permanent destinations had returned to homelessness within 24 months. Despite a small decrease in returns to homelessness between 2019 and 2020, Tompkins had the highest rate of returns to homelessness of all other comparable CoCs⁵.



⁴ SPM 1, 2020

⁵ SPM 2, 2020

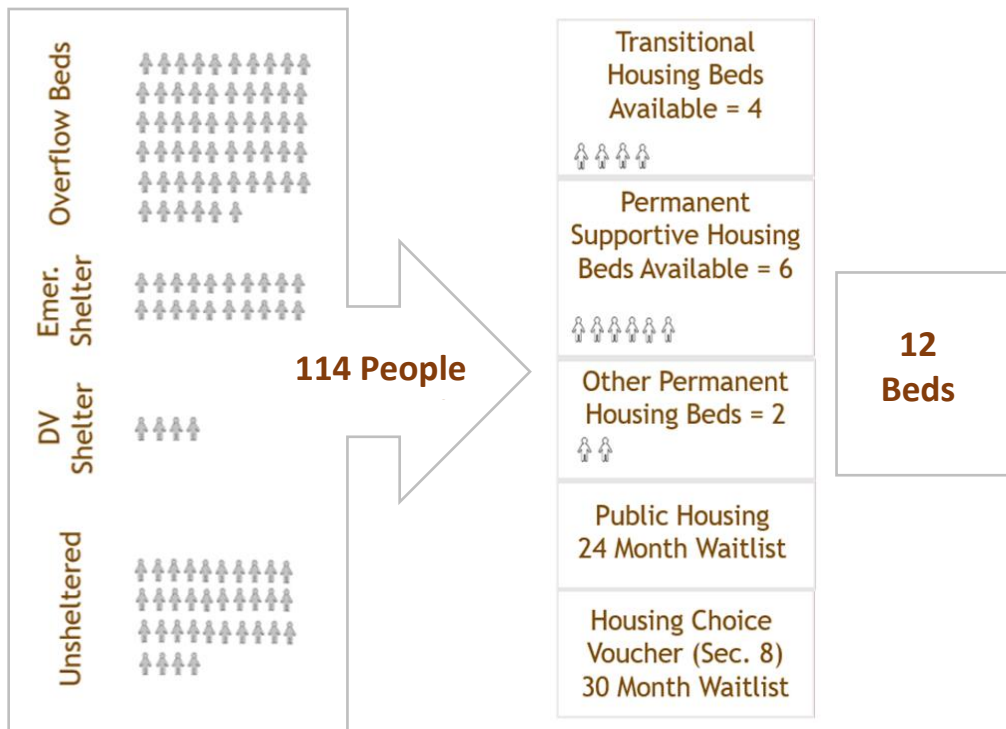
Gap Analysis

A review of 2020 and 2021 PIT and HIC data show that there was a relatively consistent gap in beds (average N=72) year to year during the PIT count. Each year there were a handful of beds available in transitional and permanent supportive housing coupled with a relatively large number of people in emergency shelter.⁶

Table 1. Gap Analysis using PIT & HIC data, 2020 & 2021

Type of Housing	2020			2021		
	Number of Beds	Population	Gap	Number of Beds	Population	Gap
Emergency Shelter (ES)	29	80	51	29	103	74
Transitional Housing (TH)	23	19	(+4)	26	20	(+6)
Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH)	113	107	(+6)	115	99	(+16)
Other Permanent Housing (OPH)	28	26	(+2)	18	18	0
Unsheltered Population		34	34		19	19
<i>Total</i>	193	266	73	188	259	71

Viewed graphically, it is easy to see a significant bottleneck in the housing system. There were 114 people who were either in emergency shelter or unsheltered in 2020. At the same time, a total of 12 beds were available in transitional and permanent housing. Wait lists for public housing and housing choice vouchers are more than two years long which functionally resulted in zero beds being available.



⁶ Overflow ES beds are available at local motels/hotels.

HMIS data provide a look at the housing gap across the year. These data show that of the 537 households who were served by the homeless system in FY2020, 101 households remained homeless. In addition to these households, there are homeless individuals living unsheltered who are not enrolled in the HMIS. It is not possible to know exactly how many people lived unsheltered and unenrolled throughout the year, and how many of those people moved into housing. However, based on the 2020 and 2021 PIT, we have estimated between 20-25 people remained unsheltered. Taken together, we find approximately 125 households did not move into permanent housing during the year. The bulk of these households are adult-only.

Table 2. HMIS Summary of Stayers in System, 2020

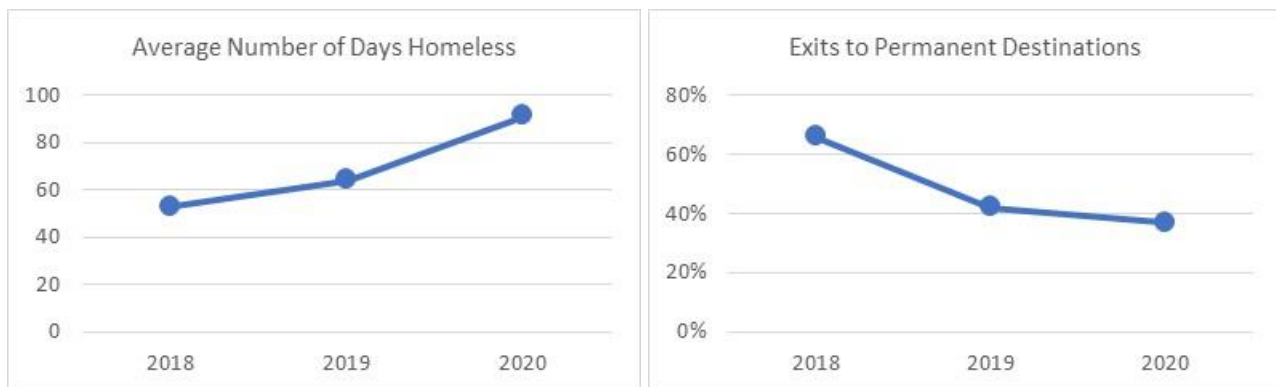
	Adults Only HH				Adult + Child HH	Child Only	All Households
	All	Vet.	Non-Vet 25+	18-24			
Served	474	26	374	75	53	1	537
Exited	390	19	316	56	41	1	436
Sheltered/Homeless	84	7	58	19	12	1	101
Unsheltered/Homeless	20-25						20-25
Total Homeless	~105	7	58	19	12	1	~125

Summary

- The county has a large number of people in an emergency shelter that is not designed for the volume of need.
- The county has insufficient transitional and permanent beds.
- The challenges are most pronounced for adult-only households.

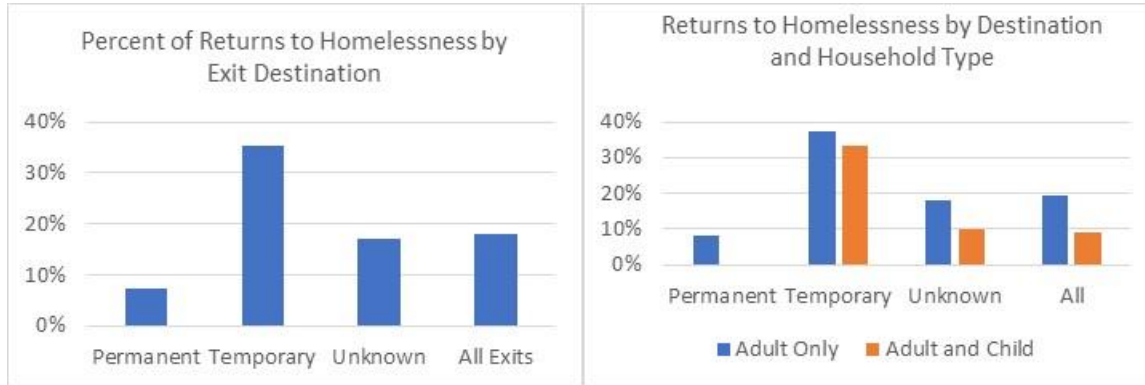
County HMIS Performance Trend Analysis

Overall, Tompkins County homeless indicators have been trending toward poorer performance in recent years. The average number of days households spend homeless has increased by over 70% since 2018, and the percent of households who exited to permanent destinations declined by 44%. In FY2020, only 37% of households in the HMIS exited to permanent destinations after spending an average of 91 days homeless⁷.



⁷ number of days households were served in ES, SH, or TH projects and the days in RRH or PSH prior to move in

Returns to homelessness are relatively high in the county. Eighteen percent of households that exited within the first six months of FY2020 returned to homelessness within six months.⁸ The highest returns to homelessness are among those who exit to temporary destinations (35%, N=19 of 54 households). This is true for all types of households. Adult only households have higher returns to homelessness across all destination types.



All Households	Adult-Only	Adult and Child
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •537 HH •91 days homeless •37% exited to permanent destination •7% returned to homelessness •40% - 30 days or fewer homeless 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •474 HH •87 days homeless •36% exited to permanent destination •8% returned to homelessness •39% - 30 days or fewer homeless 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •53 HH •71 days homeless •49% exited to permanent destinations •0% returned to homelessness •40% - 30 days or fewer homeless

Family households were less prevalent in the homeless system and generally fared much better than adult-only households. Family households spent fewer days homeless than adult-only households, had higher exits to permanent destinations, and did not return to homelessness after an exit.

Summary

- The county has had increasing difficulty moving homeless households to permanent destinations, which has resulted in more days homeless.
- Households with children generally fare better within the homelessness system, exiting more quickly to permanent destinations and returning to homelessness less often.
- Households that exit to temporary destinations are most prone to return to homelessness.

⁸ Households that exited within the first 6 months of FY2020

Population Analysis

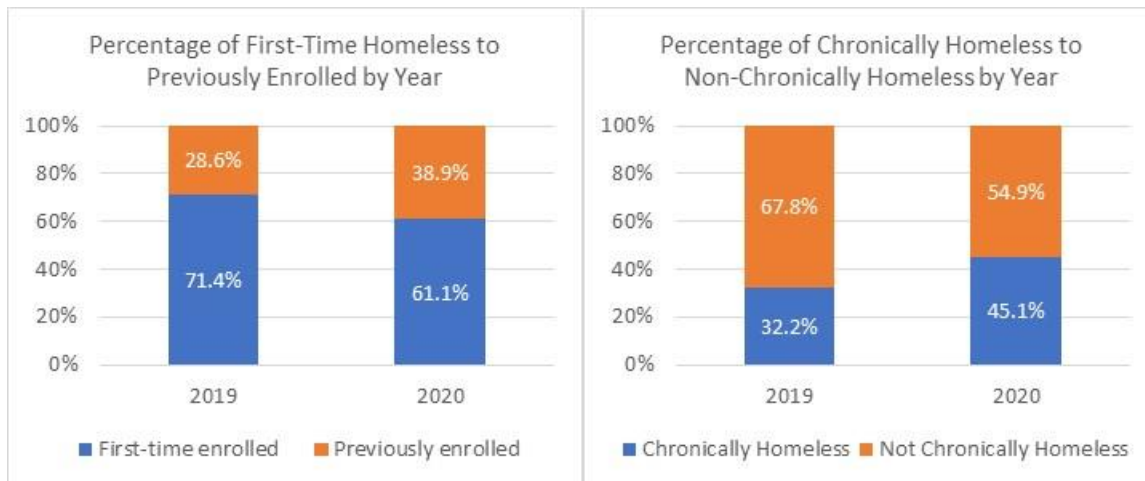
In order to have a better understanding of the characteristics of people who are homeless in the county, the types of homelessness and demographic details were analyzed in the context of exits from, and returns to, homelessness.

Types of Homelessness

Stakeholders mentioned that some people moving into permanent housing destinations end up returning to homelessness because they don't know how to maintain their housing. Data from both the PIT and HMIS verify this perception.

Data show that more people experiencing homelessness in the county are cycling in and out of homelessness than in the previous year. HMIS data show that first-time enrollees in the system decreased from 71.4% in 2019 to 61.1% in 2020. This trend is echoed in the number of chronically homeless people identified in the PIT. The percent of people who were identified as chronically homeless increased from 32.2% in 2019 to 45.1% in 2020.

Stakeholders suggested there is an opportunity to either provide transitional housing to help people learn how to maintain housing, or to provide post-placement support to intervene before people lose their housing.



Demographic Analysis

An analysis of available data shows demographic differences in whether someone experiences homelessness, whether they are likely to be sheltered or unsheltered, and whether they return to homelessness after exiting.

Point in Time Count & HMIS

The homeless population identified in the 2020 PIT in Tompkins County was disproportionately male, non-white, and older as compared to the county's population.

Males and people over age 24 are also over-represented in the HMIS as compared to the Tompkins County population. Race and ethnicity are more difficult to compare between the HMIS and PIT because the two data sources do not classify Hispanic/Latino in the same way. Despite this challenge, it is clear

that people of color (with the exception of people of Asian descent) are disproportionately over-represented in the HMIS as compared with white people.

Table 3. Demographic Comparison: HMIS, PIT, and County Population

	HMIS 2020	PIT 2020	Tompkins County Population
<i>Age</i>	<i>(All Persons in HH)</i>		
< 18	10.7%	4.5%	14.90%
18-24	15.2%	18.8%	26.90%
>24	73.4%	76.7%	58.40%
<i>Gender Identity</i>	<i>(HOH and Adults)</i>		
Female	37.7%	33.1%	50.60%
Male	61.7%	66.2%	49.40%
Transgender/Non-Binary	0.6%	0.8%	NA
<i>Race/Ethnicity</i>	<i>(HOH and Adults)</i>		
White, Non-Latino/Non-Hispanic	57.5%	67.7%	77.1%
Black/African American	29.7%	27.1%	3.5%
Asian	0.4%	1.5%	9.6%
Hispanic/Latino	3.6%	10.5%	5.2%
Other race alone	0.6%	0.0%	0.6%
Two or more races	5.4%	3.8%	3.7%

Sheltered vs. Unsheltered

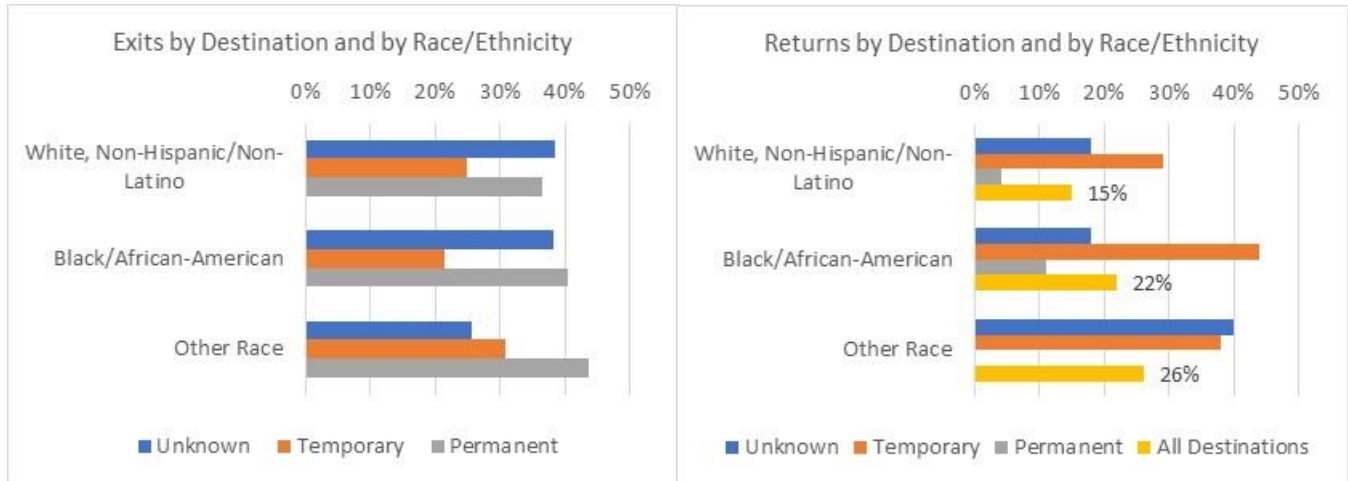
While the homeless population is over-represented by Black and Hispanic/Latino individuals, the 2020 PIT count showed that the unsheltered population was disproportionately white. In addition, the entire unsheltered population identified in the PIT was over the age of 24, and nearly three-quarters were male. Information from stakeholders indicate that these data do not account for couch-surfers who tend to primarily be people of color and/or young people.

Table 4. Demographic Comparison: Sheltered and Unsheltered PIT 2020

	Sheltered (ES+TH)	Unsheltered
<i>Total Number</i>	99	34
<i>Age</i>		
< 18	6.1%	0.0%
18-24	25.3%	0.0%
>24	68.7%	100.0%
<i>Gender Identity</i>		
Female	35.4%	26.5%
Male	63.6%	73.5%
Transgender/Non-Binary	1.0%	0.0%
<i>Race/Ethnicity</i>		
White, Non-Latino/Non-Hispanic	61%	88%
Black/African American	33%	9%
Asian	2%	0%
Hispanic/Latino	11%	9%
Other race alone	0%	0%
Two or more races	4%	3%

Exits and Returns from HMIS

Data from HMIS show that the number exits and returns to homelessness differ by race and ethnicity. Households led by non-white adults were more likely to exit to a permanent destination, and households led by white adults were somewhat more likely to exit to a temporary destination. Households led by Black/African-American adults (22%) and were more likely to return to homelessness than households led by white adults (15%).



Summary

- More people are cycling in and out of homelessness than in the past.
- Race, ethnicity, and age seem to have an impact on the type of homelessness experienced, the path out of homelessness, and the likelihood of returning to homelessness.

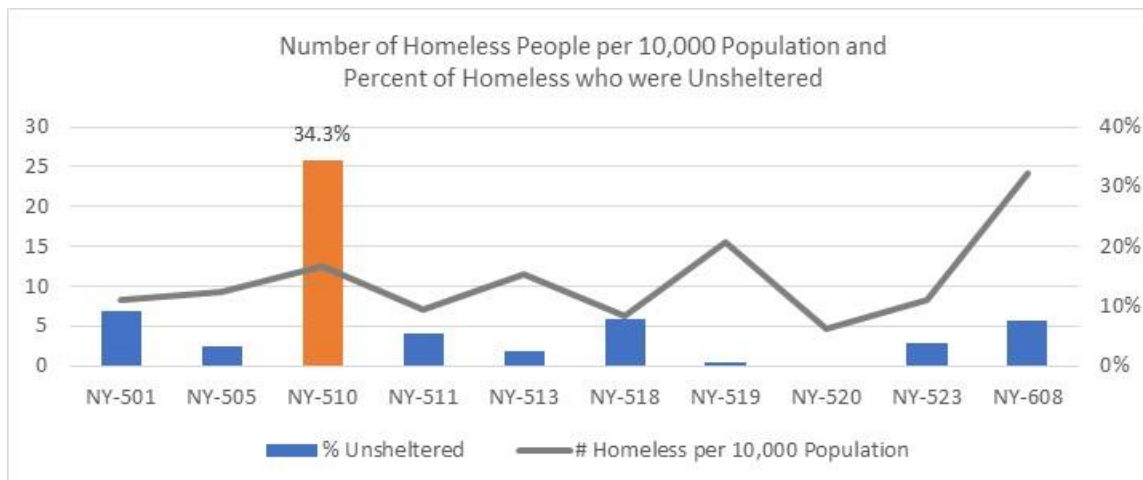
Encampments

Ithaca has been home to long-standing homeless encampments on land owned by the city between the Cayuga Inlet and Route 13 in the areas behind Wegmans, Lowes, and Walmart. The city and county have taken a mostly “hands-off” approach to the encampments. There have been occasional attempts by the city to clear the encampments, but, for the most part, campers simply shifted to other locations. Recent harm-reduction efforts have been implemented in the encampments, including installing porta-potties and hand-washing stations, and creating road access for emergency vehicles. Several local non-profits conduct frequent outreach to people living in the encampments, bringing food, health care, and other needed supports, as well as offering assistance to navigate the emergency shelter system. Stakeholders estimated the current population in the encampments to be between 20 and 25.

Barriers to Housing: Encampment Dwellers

- Sex offender status precludes access to housing supports
- Difficulty navigating DSS requirements which results in being sanctioned/losing access to shelter
- Unwillingness to engage in addiction services or to refrain from using substances
- Having dogs that are not welcome in the shelter or housing
- Housing is unaffordable even with Section 8 vouchers
- Unwillingness to give up autonomy

Compared with other CoCs, Tompkins County had the highest ratio of unsheltered homeless to total homeless (34.3%). Of note, NY-519 and NY-608, had higher rates of homeless than Tompkins, but had significantly fewer homeless who were unsheltered. Kingston (NY-608) has had a history of homeless encampments similar to the encampments in Tompkins County. It appears that Ulster County removes encampments as they crop up, which may account for their lower unsheltered ratio.



Stakeholders and interview participants generally agreed on the challenges preventing people from moving out of the encampments. Both stakeholders and interview participants mentioned shelter rules and requirements, and the difficulty of navigating the social services system, as key reasons people live in the encampment instead of going to the emergency shelter. Interview participants reported challenges navigating all of the requirements for accessing housing support. One interview participant described his experience with trying to get assistance with housing as frustrating. He said, *“Whatever I sent them, they’d find something else, some other question. I got so irritated. I have a lot of anxiety, so I gave up on it. I was on the verge of maybe getting an apartment up there. I just couldn’t get in. Maybe it was the company I was keeping? It became a hassle for me, personally.”* Another interview participant said, *“I’m not going to jump through the hoops for anybody for housing. I have no reason to go to CARS. I have been to rehab. I won’t go to another rehab just to have housing. I love smoking weed and do a little bit of ice. I don’t need help getting off it. I’m not drama, and I’m not causing trouble. They should just leave me alone. I just want to get into housing and get a job. That’s all I want. If they’ll leave me alone, and not give me a time limit.”*

A handful of stakeholders said they believed that many of the encampment inhabitants preferred the lifestyle, but information from individuals living in the encampment belies that perception. One interview participant said, *“It’s not my thing to live like this. I want to live on the grid. I’ve just had some speedbumps on the way.”* All of the interviewed individuals said they wanted to get into housing, but felt they did not have the options and support necessary, or they were unable or unwilling to navigate the rules and requirements to do so. Interview participants said they believed the larger community did not care about them, as evidenced by the continuing acceptance of the encampments. Encampment dwellers also reported being very concerned about the drugs and crime within the encampment. Most of the individuals interviewed in the encampment said they were worried about their safety.

Stakeholders and interview participants noted that there are restrictions on whether an individual is allowed to access funding or housing, which could be a reason why someone stays in the encampment. Sex offenders who have a lifetime registration requirement are barred from receiving federal housing assistance. In addition, people who have been sanctioned by DSS for non-compliance are ineligible for assistance for a period of time. These sanctions may result from a variety of infractions including not participating in rehabilitative services, missing appointments with case workers, not participating in employment or training programs, and not sufficiently seeking housing.

Stakeholders frequently mentioned the need for a low-threshold shelter to move people from the encampments into housing. Information from people living in the encampments suggest this type of option may be welcome, particularly if the shelter offers support to identify and secure appropriate housing in an affirmative, non-judgmental, case-specific manner.

Some stakeholders also suggested the county explore a sanctioned encampment, which could provide some type of minimal shelter (e.g. lean-tos), bathrooms and showers, and some type of rules and security. For the most part, interviewed participants believed a sanctioned encampment would not be an effective solution.

Characteristics of Low-Threshold Shelter

- Permits pets
- Partners are allowed to enter together
- Access to lockers/storage for possessions
- Does not require sobriety
- Does not require participation in mental health or substance use treatment
- No curfews
- Flexible lengths of stay
- Not required to pay for bed/apply for assistance

Summary

- Creating a new shelter or shifting the current shelter to a low-barrier shelter could provide a bridge for people living in the encampments to access permanent housing.

Couch-Surfers

Stakeholders frequently remarked on the group of homeless people relying on couch-surfing for shelter and suggested that the group is typically young and/or people of color. Couch-surfers do not fall within HUD's definition of homelessness⁹ and are not captured in the PIT. There is no data source regularly tracking the number of couch-surfers in the county.

The lack of data makes it difficult understand the scale of the couch-surfing population. Data from the APR indicate that 31% of the people served by the homeless system come from a couch-surfing situation¹⁰. Of the 530 people served by the emergency shelter system in FY2020, 179 reported coming from a couch-surfing situation. In addition, 6 people of 25 people using transitional housing and 18 of 91 people in permanent supportive housing were couch-surfing prior to entering housing. These data may include duplicate

Estimated number of couch-surfers in Tompkins County

- **203** people entering the homelessness system in FY2020 came from a couch-surfing situation
- **188** independent youth aged 18-24 are estimated to be couch-surfing
- **910** people are living in a non-relative's household

⁹https://files.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/HomelessDefinition_RecordkeepingRequirementsandCriteria.pdf

¹⁰ Staying or living in a friend's or family member's room, apartment, or house

individuals because some people cycle in and out of homelessness during the year, but nonetheless reveal a significant population relying on insecure housing.

The Independent Living Survey (ILS) conducted in 2019¹¹ supported the conclusion that young people experiencing homelessness are more likely to couch-surf than to stay at the emergency shelter or in the homeless encampment. The vast majority of respondents (87.5%) reported they had changed housing at least once in the past month. Respondents most commonly said that in the past week they had stayed in someone else's home (38%), or at several different friends' homes (35%). Just over a quarter (27%) said they had stayed at the shelter, and only 4% said they had stayed in the encampment. HMIS data for FY2020 revealed 75 young adults (aged 18-24)¹² had been served by the emergency shelter. The 2019 ILS reported 35% of interviewed youth had used the emergency shelter in the past year. These two data points suggest that approximately 214 people aged 18-24 were homeless during the year, the bulk (88%) of whom (estimated N=188) had moved at least once during the previous month.

One other proposed method of estimating the couch-surfing population uses Census data to identify the number of people in households who were "other non-relatives". The technique filters out all close relatives, housemates or roommates, unmarried partners, and foster children as well as people living in correctional facilities, nursing homes, college dormitories.¹³ This process would suggest that 910 couch-surfers live in a non-relative's household. Of these, 80 were aged 16-17 and 340 were aged 18-24. (See Appendix C. Couch-Surfer Estimate Methodology: Census Data) These data do not include couch surfers living in a relative's home.

Qualitative information gathered from interviewed participants also support stakeholders' perception that youth are more likely to couch-surf than to access the emergency shelter. Of the eight interview participants who were in their teens or twenties, six were couch-surfing. These interview participants indicated concerns for their safety, insecurity about how long they could stay where they currently were, and a lack of knowledge of where to get assistance.

A potential difficulty in reducing the number of people couch-surfing is the system's encouragement, or requirement, of some homeless people to stay with family or friends. Young homeless people, in particular, are faced with this challenge. Families are required to pay support back to the county if they say their child is not welcome back in the home¹⁴. If a family says the child can return to the home, there is no mechanism to ensure that the child stays there or to facilitate family conflict resolution.

¹¹ 2019 Independent Living Survey Project Summary of Findings, collaboration of the Bronfenbrenner Center for Translational Research, The Learning Web, participants in The Learning Web's Youth Outreach Program, and the Tompkins County Youth Services Department. Captured 1/5/2022 from <https://www2.tompkinscountyny.gov/files2/youth/2019%20Independent%20Living%20Survey%205-WEB%20VERSION.pdf>

¹² Adult only household (18-24)

¹³ Hoback, Alan & Anderson, Scott. (2022). Proposed Method for Estimating Local Population of Precariously Housed

¹⁴ Regulations of the Department of Social Services, Section 370.2 – Determination of initial eligibility. Retrieved from: <https://regs.health.ny.gov/content/section-3702-determination-initial-eligibility> 1/14/2022

In addition, the Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA) requires that people applying for temporary housing assistance to prove that housing with friends or relatives is unavailable. Applicants who are unable to explain why they cannot provide documentation, or refuse to provide contact information, are denied assistance for failure to cooperate.¹⁵ The system essentially requires unhoused individuals to prove that they *cannot* couch-surf.

Summary

- Couch-surfers represent a sizable population at high risk for homelessness and are not reflected in the PIT.
- Couch-surfing is implicitly required by the system despite the likelihood that it will result in continued homelessness.
- Qualitative information from young couch-surfers indicate they have a lack of knowledge of resources and are resistant to utilizing the emergency shelter.

Emergency Shelter

Some stakeholders reported that the emergency shelter in the county was insufficiently sized to meet the needs of the homeless population in the county, and is not set-up to meet the short-term needs of homeless households. Some stakeholders said there was a need for a larger shelter, while others indicated a preference for low-barrier housing, such as single room occupancy (SRO) housing, with supportive services provided. The 2016 Tompkins County Housing Strategy targeted 100 beds of SROs needed by 2025.

Resources Available

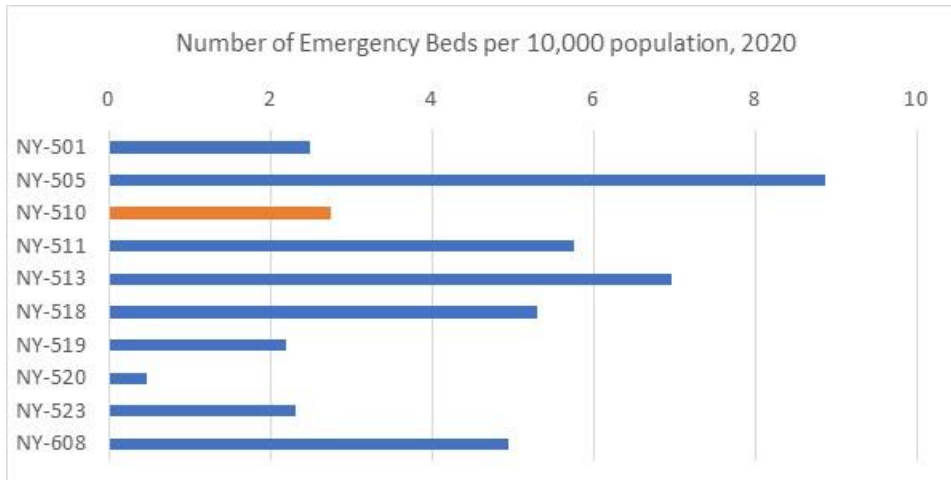
The emergency shelter, run by St. John’s Community Services, provides 20 beds in their facility. In addition, St. John’s offers overflow beds in local motels and hotels. Tompkins County also has one other emergency shelter provided by the Advocacy Center which has a total of nine beds to people fleeing domestic violence.

Table 5. Emergency Shelter Resources

Organization	Project Name	Target Population	Beds
Advocacy Center	Advocacy Center	Domestic Violence	9
St. Johns Community Services	Emergency Shelter		20
St. Johns Community Services	Overflow beds		56
Total Beds			85

HIC data from 2020 show that Tompkins County’s has a lower capacity of emergency beds per 10,000 population than most of the surrounding and comparable CoCs.

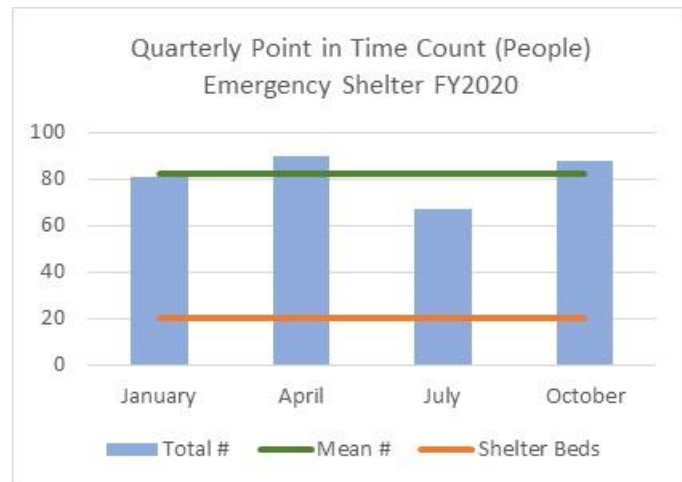
¹⁵ OTDA, TA Policy – Questions and Answers. Retrieved from: <https://otda.ny.gov/policy/directives/2018/INF/18-INF-09-Attachment-1.pdf> 1/14/2022



Point in Time Counts

In the 2020 PIT, 80 people were counted in the emergency shelter, only 25% of whom could be physically housed at St. John’s. The rest were sheltered in local motel rooms. In the past, motel rooms were primarily used during Code Blue.¹⁶ In recent years, the number of people staying in motel rooms throughout the year has increased.

The APR reports provide quarterly point in time counts by housing category. The APR for emergency housing show an average of 82 people from 71 households were using the emergency shelter during FY2020¹⁷. While there was a decrease of people using shelter services in the summer, the number of households accessing emergency shelter services still exceeded the number of shelter beds by three-fold.



As noted by stakeholders, the cost of housing people in motels is very expensive as compared to the shelter. One night’s stay in a motel costs the county \$103. Stakeholders also said that sheltering people in motel rooms creates challenges in providing support to those individuals. Some stakeholders said it was much more difficult to for households to access services when housed in motels. One interview participant suggested this is true. She said, “DSS makes it impossible to get help. They cut off my food stamps because they didn’t know where I was, but they knew I had been in the shelter (motel) for three months.”

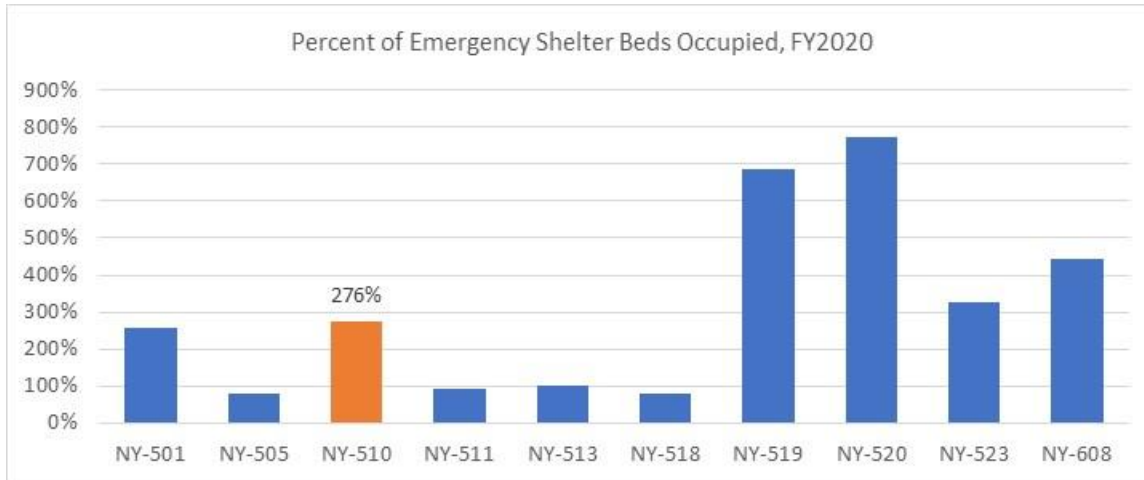
Utilization

Nearly all of the surrounding and comparable CoCs had more than 100% of their emergency beds occupied during the 2020 PIT, suggesting there is a consistent use of motel rooms for emergency shelter

¹⁶ Code Blue is triggered when temperatures dip below 32 degrees Fahrenheit. During Code Blue anyone requiring assistance is provided shelter without the regular eligibility requirements and intake procedures.

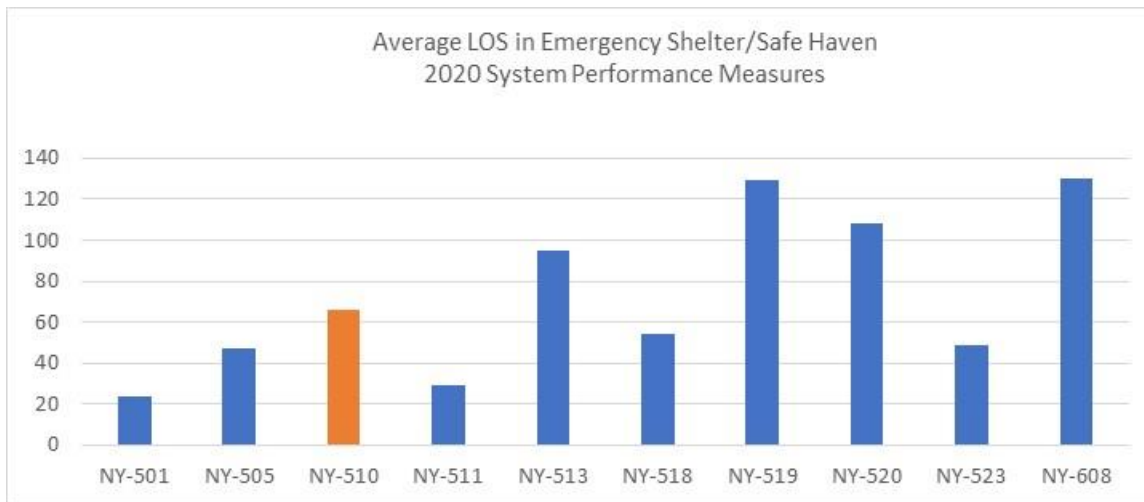
¹⁷ Fiscal Year 2020 (FY2020) is comprised of the dates 10/1/2019 through 9/30/2020.

across the region. Information from the Advocacy Center indicates that their domestic violence shelter’s occupancy rates have been consistently high, particularly during the pandemic.



Length of Stay

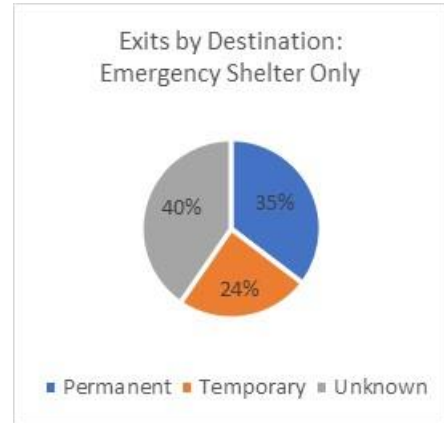
The average length of stay (LOS)¹⁸ people spend in emergency shelter in Tompkins County is right in the middle of comparable and surrounding counties. The Advocacy Center reported longer lengths of stay in the domestic violence shelter than usual in recent years.



¹⁸ System Performance Measures, SPM 1, HUD

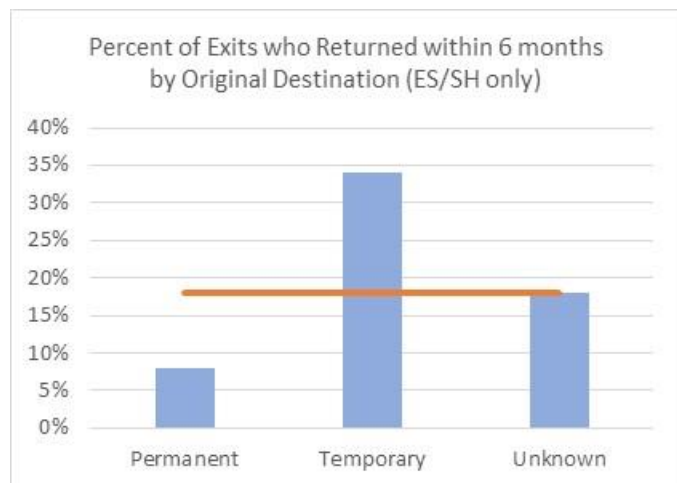
Exits and Returns

Data from the emergency housing APR shows that nearly 90% of the people that used the emergency shelter in FY2020 exited within the year. More than two-thirds of households leaving the emergency shelter exited to either temporary or unknown destinations. Data from HUD’s System Performance Measures¹⁹ show Tompkins County has one of the highest rates of return to homelessness from emergency shelters as compared to other comparable and surrounding CoCs. Only NY-501 (Elmira/Steuben, Allegany, Livingston, Chemung, and Schuyler Counties) had a higher rate of return within 24 months.



Of Tompkins County households that had exited the emergency shelter during the reporting period (N=218), 18% (N=40) had already returned to homelessness within six months. Over a third (34%) of households exiting the emergency shelter in Tompkins County returned to homelessness within two years.

Households leaving to temporary destinations were much more likely to return to homelessness (35%) than those exiting to permanent destinations.



Stakeholders said the primary challenges in moving people out of the emergency shelter was a lack of permanent housing options, including permanent supportive housing and subsidized housing. Interview participants echoed this view. One person staying in the shelter said, “I’m chronically homeless because there’s no place for people to go.” Another interview participant at the shelter noted, “Ithaca has one of the highest costs of living in New York.”

¹⁹ SPM 2 (Emergency Shelter)

One interview participant suggested she needed more assistance finding housing. She said, *“I think [getting housing] should be an easier process. It shouldn’t have to be ten different steps. I think they should help you, give you options. I just know it needs to be a lot easier. The waiting process is forever. They’ll say they will get you a place in 10 months. You forget about it and move on. It definitely should be easier.”*

Stakeholders also suggested that some individuals needed more wraparound support after leaving the shelter to ensure they could maintain housing.

Summary

- The emergency shelter in Tompkins County is insufficiently sized to meet the needs of unhoused people in the county.
- A significant portion of people exiting the shelter return to homelessness, particularly those who exited to temporary destinations.
- The county’s lack of available, affordable permanent housing contributes to long lengths of stay in the shelter and frequent returns to homelessness.
- To date, only 4 of the 100 SRO beds identified as needed in the county Housing Strategy have been built.

Transitional Housing

When asked to identify successes in housing in the county, several stakeholders mentioned the transitional housing available through the Learning Web, OAR, and Catholic Charities. Some stakeholders noted the need for more transitional housing in the county. These stakeholders suggested that transitional housing provides unhoused people the time and support they need to reorient themselves to the requirements of maintaining housing.

Resources Available

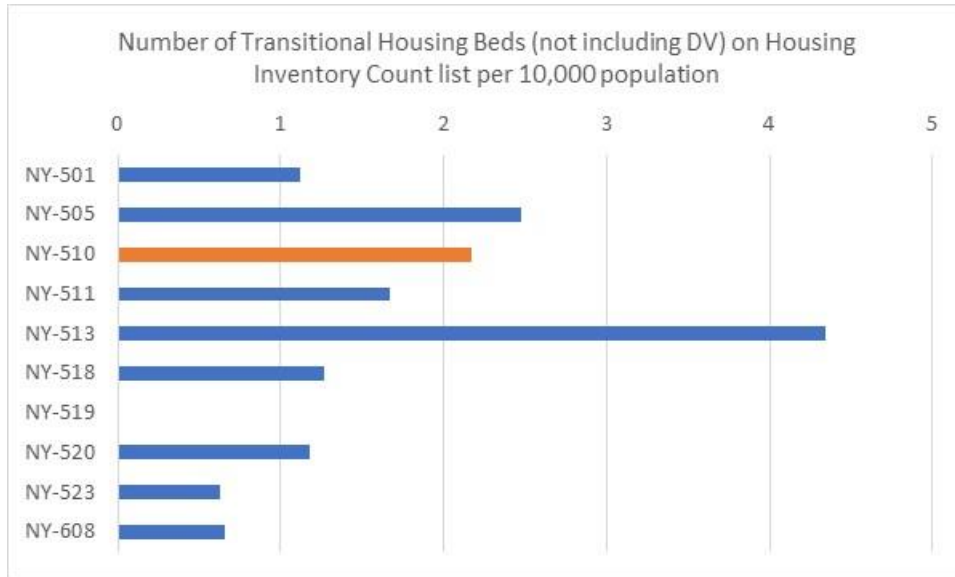
In 2020, 23 transitional housing beds were available in Tompkins County.²⁰ In 2021, the Learning Web add three beds, increasing the total number of transitional housing beds to 26. Transitional housing in the county is targeted to specific populations. Over half of the beds are available to homeless youth aged 16-24.

Table 6. Transitional Housing Resources

Organization	Project Name	Target Population	Beds
Catholic Charities, Tompkins/Tioga	A Place to Stay	Single homeless women	4
Learning Web	Building Foundations TH	Youth 16-24	6
Learning Web	TLP TH	Youth 16-24	11
OAR	Endeavor House	Sober men returning from incarceration	5
<i>Total beds</i>			26

²⁰ 2020 HIC data

Compared to other CoCs, Tompkins had the third highest rate of transitional housing beds per 10,000 population.

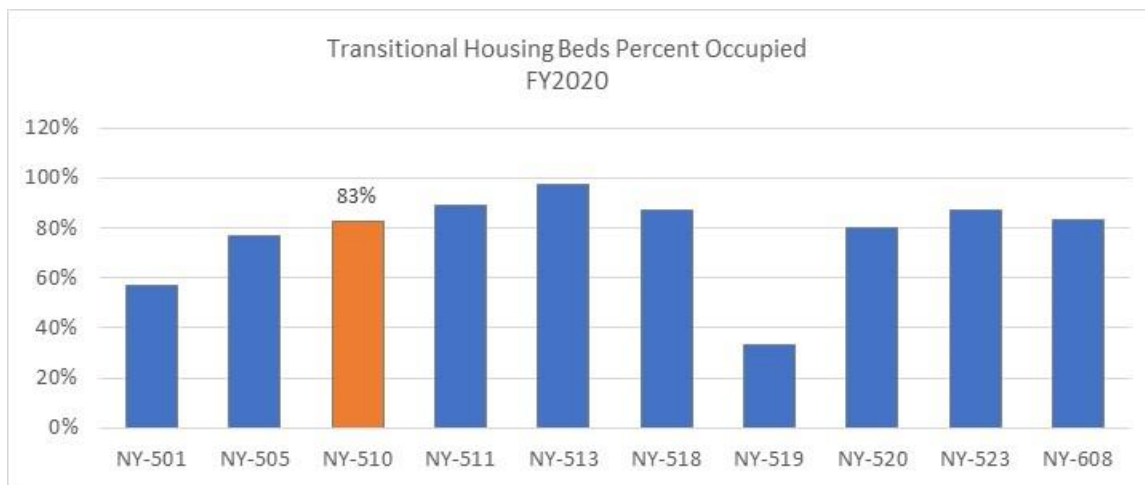


Point in Time Counts

In the 2020 PIT, 19 people were counted as being sheltered in temporary housing. The bulk (N=13) were people aged 18-24.

Utilization

Utilization of transitional housing beds is high in Tompkins County at 83%, as with nearly all other surrounding and similar CoCs.



Length of Stay

People in transitional housing have a limited amount of time they can stay in the program. In Tompkins County, the people who leave transitional stayed for about eight months.

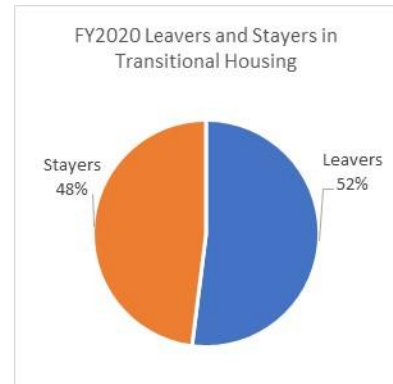
Table 7. Transitional Housing Length of Stay

	Average Length of Stay
Leavers	241
Stayers	214

Exits and Returns

Stakeholders reported that the benefit of transitional housing is that it can provide support with learning life skills, addiction and mental health services, structure and supervision, and education and training. Data show that the transitional housing options in Tompkins County have been effective at moving people into permanent housing and keeping them from returning to homelessness.

During FY2020, 13 individuals exited out of transitional housing, ten of whom went to permanent destinations (77%). Only one household out of 14 (7%) that exited to a permanent destination in the year prior returned to homelessness within six months. Stakeholders noted that the county’s transitional housing is effective because providers have low resident-to-caseworker ratios and can offer one-on-one case management and support.



There are some key drawbacks to transitional housing. The model is contrary to the Housing First model primary tenet that there should be no “readiness” requirement prior to being permanently housed. In addition, transitional housing requires successful tenants to move on, which is only possible if affordable independent housing is available. Another key downside to transitional housing is that HUD has shifted the Emergency Solutions Grants (ESG) funding away from transitional housing to focus specifically on street outreach, emergency shelter, homelessness prevention, rapid re-housing assistance, and HMIS.

Summary

- Transitional housing can be an effective model, but is not in alignment with Housing First and may not be fundable.

Permanent Supportive Housing

Stakeholders nearly universally noted the need for more permanent supportive housing in the county. In particular, stakeholders said PSH with mental health supports were needed.

Resources Available

HIC data from 2020 show Tompkins County had 115 permanent supportive housing beds.

In addition to PSH, Second Wind Cottages provides housing to 18 previously homeless men working toward recovery. Residents are asked to pay a program fee if they are able, but housing is not predicated on ability to pay. Second Wind is a clean and sober environment and support is available for life skills training, meals and social events, laundry facilities, exercise equipment, and a food pantry.

In 2016, the Housing Strategy proposed that 100 additional beds of PSH were needed in the county by 2025. In the most recent Housing Snapshot (2020), the department reported that 32 PSH beds had been created and 50 new beds were added in the past year. The current total is 165 permanent supportive beds, for a rate of 15.6 per 10,000 population.

Table 8. Permanent Supportive Housing Resources

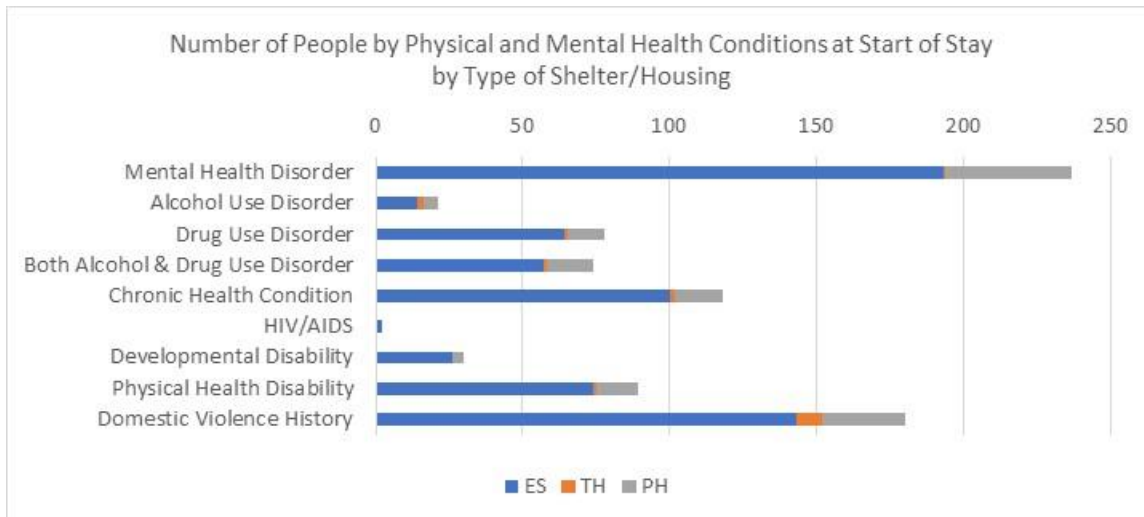
Organization	Project Name	Target Population	Beds
Lakeview Mental Health Services	Lakeview SROs	Mental Health	8
St. Johns Community Services	SRO Beds		15
Tompkins Community Action	Amici House	Homeless Youth	36
Tompkins Community Action	Chartwell House	SRO men in recovery	12
Tompkins Community Action	Corn Street Apartments	Young pregnant or parenting households	16
Tompkins Community Action	Magnolia House	Women in recovery	21
VA Tompkins	HUD-VASH	Veterans	7
<i>2020 Total PSH</i>			<i>115</i>
Vecino	Arthaus	Youth 18-25/formerly in foster care	40
Lakeview	West End Heights		10
<i>2021 Total PSH</i>			<i>165</i>

Tompkins County is on track to complete additional PSH in the coming years. According to the 2020 Housing Snapshot from the county’s Department of Planning and Sustainability, in addition to West End Heights and Arthaus, four more housing units will be created by Second Wind Cottages in Dryden for at-risk adult women and children, and 12 beds for recently incarcerated men (Sunflower House) will be created by OAR, UAR, and INHS. It seems likely that Tompkins County will meet the Housing Strategy goal for PSH.

Despite the increases in the number of PSH beds in Tompkins County, stakeholders report a continued need for permanent supportive housing. Stakeholders noted that supportive housing is needed for people who are homeless, or at risk for homelessness, and:

- have untreated mental health issues
- have substance use disorders
- are young people aging out of foster care
- have been out of housing for long periods of time
- are recently released from incarceration
- have trauma backgrounds/intergenerational family disruptions
- sex offenders

Data from emergency housing APR support the need for housing for these populations. In 2020, a large number of people came into the emergency shelter with a mental health disorder, a chronic health conditions, a history of domestic violence, a physical health disability, or substance use disorder. These data suggest that PSH in any of these categories are needed.



Compared with other CoCs, Tompkins County has a high rate of PSH per 10,000 population. Tompkins County’s PSH rate exceeds all other CoCs except NY-505 (Syracuse, Auburn/Onondaga, Oswego, Cayuga Counties) and NY-518 (Utica, Rome/Oneida, Madison Counties).



Utilization

According to permanent housing APR data, an average of 79 people were housed in PSH during 2020 putting the utilization rate at 68.7%. This rate indicates there may be some challenges with keeping PSH beds effectively filled.

The bulk of PSH beds are targeted to specific populations which may be part of the difficulty in filling open beds. One stakeholder noted that a portion of unhoused people do not want the rules and restrictions of supportive housing. Another stakeholder said that the application for housing can be burdensome, which prevents some people from accessing supportive housing. One interview participant who was in PSH agreed with all of these points. She said, *“It’s just the whole process. Getting the money to pay for rent, getting Section 8, keeping Section 8, jumping through all these hoops is really hard. Being homeless sucks. I have lived in tents, hotels. I just got out of hotels and got into Magnolia House.”* She also said at times it was difficult for her to live in PSH. She said other residents in the house were using drugs, which made it hard for her to stay sober. She said she frequently stayed with someone else to get a break from the temptation. She also mentioned that she had to give up her Section 8 voucher in order to go into the PSH, and was concerned about how she would find a home where she could be reunited with her children.

Overall, interview participants did not indicate they were in need of supportive housing, although some expressed concerns about other homeless people having sufficient life skills to maintain housing. One interview participant said, *“You need to teach people hygiene, cooking, and basic, every day skills. And also instill coping skills.”* Another interview participant expressed concern about her own mental health in moving into housing alone.

Seven interview participants mentioned the new housing options available at Arthaus, four of whom had recently had their application accepted. Participants who were not moving into Arthaus expressed both the hope that they would find housing, and also concern that people moving in would not take good care of the property.

Length of Stay

APR data show that people in PSH stay for long periods of time. People leaving PSH stay an average of nearly two years, while stayers stay an average of three years.

Table 9. Permanent Supportive Housing Length of Stay

	Average Length of Stay
Leavers	631
Stayers	1087

Exits and Returns

PSH, understandably, has a very slow turnover of beds. APR data showed that nearly 80% of residents stayed in PSH. During FY2020, only ten households in PSH exited from the HMIS. Five of these households exited to permanent destinations, three to temporary destinations, and two to unknown destinations. None of the households that left the homeless system from PSH in 2020 had returned to homelessness within six months. Two of 15 households (13.3%) that left PSH in the past two years returned to homelessness. These data suggest that PSH is effective at reducing returns to homelessness.



Rapid Re-Housing

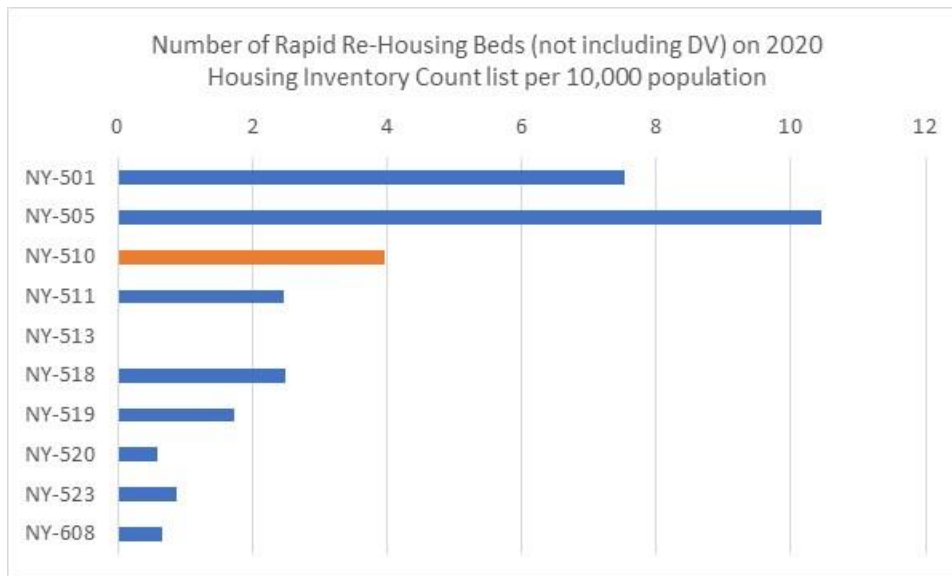
Rapid Re-Housing (RRH) is a vehicle to provide money to people who are either homeless, or at risk for homelessness, to find and maintain housing.

Resources Available

The 2020 HIC showed that Tompkins County had a total of 42 RRH “beds” available. As compared to other CoCs, Tompkins county had the third highest rate of RRH beds per 10,000 population.

Summary

- Permanent supportive housing has proven effective at disrupting the cycle of homelessness in Tompkins County.
- Recent additional PSH has offered housing, and hope, to the county’s unhoused population.
- Additional PSH could be helpful, particularly with support focusing on mental health, trauma, and other physical health conditions.
- Longer-term returns to homelessness from PSH point to a larger housing problem in the county.



In 2021, RRH beds increased to 74. Tompkins County DSS added beds, and Tompkins Community Action (TCA), Soldier On, and the Veteran’s Administration started offering RRH support.

Table 10. Rapid Re-Housing Resources

Organization	Project Name	Target Population	Beds
Soldier On	SO RRH	Veterans	3
TCA	TBRA		10
Tompkins DSS	ESG-CV & STEHP		54
VA Tompkins	HUD-VASH	Veterans	7
Total RRH			74

The RRH funding streams for each of these organizations varies. The Tompkins County Department of Social Services (DSS) provides RRH through the Solutions to End Homelessness Program (STEHP) and the Coronavirus Emergency Solutions Grants (ESG-CV). In addition, the county provides significant financial support to DSS’s RRH program. STEHP and ESG-CV funding allows DSS to start working with homeless individuals and households as they try to obtain housing. Once housing is found, RRH participants then receive rental assistance for a period of time. In many cases, that can be up to a year of assistance.

Tompkins Community Action provides RRH through HOME Tenant-Based Rental Assistance (TBRA) funding. TBRA allows programs to provide security deposit assistance or monthly rental assistance to homeless individuals or families, as well as provide financial assistance to income-eligible households at risk of losing their housing.

Utilization

During FY2020, APR data show that 121 people in 63 households were served by RRH programs. However, HMIS data show 48 households received RRH support. The discrepancy between the data systems may be due to households cycling in and out of the program, corrections being made to the data after submission to HUD, or other data anomalies.

Days Homeless

HMIS data indicate that households receiving RRH support in Tompkins County spent an average of 58 days without housing before obtaining a move-in date.

Exits and Returns

For RRH, a household is considered “exited” from the system when they are no longer receiving financial assistance. APR data show that 112 of the 121 people served by RRH exited the program during FY2020. Nearly 93% of the people (N=104) exiting RRH left to permanent destinations. Return data from the HMIS data show that 12.1% of households that had exited RRH during the previous two years had returned to homelessness.

A key benefit to RRH noted by one stakeholder was that RRH provides housing funds to people who do not have vulnerability factors that would place them high on the list for other housing support. In addition, RRH may be effective in interrupting the homelessness cycle because the funds can be used providing funding for rent, security deposits, and utility assistance to households are risk for losing their housing. The funds can also be used for a longer period of time to act as a bridge until longer term rental assistance is available.

As noted by stakeholders, the main barrier to RRH is the lack of affordable housing available in the county. Interview participants suggested they needed additional assistance finding housing.

Summary

- RRH has offered a path to provide assistance to less vulnerable households who likely would not be eligible for other supportive housing services.
- Households that are currently homeless could use additional support finding housing in conjunction with receiving financial support.
- Increased availability of affordable housing could improve the impact of RRH.

Subsidized Housing

Tompkins County residents have access to subsidized housing through both Housing Choice Vouchers (HCV), also known as Section 8 vouchers, and public housing at the Ithaca Housing Authority.

Resources Available and Utilization

There are 2,727 subsidized units available in the county²¹, over 80% of which are HCVs. Both the vouchers and housing units are nearly fully utilized with 93% of all units used/occupied. Stakeholders and interview participants said vacant housing is frequently too expensive for households to pay even with subsidies, and is difficult to find.

Table 11. Subsidized Housing Resources

	Subsidized Units Available	Percent Occupied	Percent moved in past year	Number of people per unit	Number of people total	Avg. Family Expend. per Month
HCV	2,229	93%	10%	2	4,216	\$370
Public Housing	457	92%	9%	1.5	620	\$375
Project Based HCV	41	97%	8%	1.1	41	\$376
All	2,727	93%	10%	1.9	4,877	\$371

Days to Housing and Length of Stay

Stakeholders remarked on a lack of housing providers accepting subsidies. Despite the law prohibiting landlords from discriminating against renters based on their use of vouchers or subsidies, reports of landlords refusing subsidies continue. LawNY reportedly had three active cases against Tompkins County landlords in 2021²².

Stakeholders and interview participants frequently mentioned very long wait lists for both vouchers and public housing. Data from HUD supports this perception.. The average amount of time a household spends on a waiting list for an HCV in Tompkins County is 30 months. For public housing, households wait an average of 24 months before units are available. One interview participant said she had a HCV and waited for seven months before she was able to attain to housing. Another interview participant said her parents had given her five months to stay before they were going to kick her out. She was hopeful she would receive her Section 8 voucher before that happened.

People with vouchers, or in public housing, tend to stay for long periods of time. The average length of stay with HCVs is 95 months and in public housing 91 months.

Table 12. Subsidized Housing Days to Housing and Length of Stay

	Avg. Number of Months on Waiting List	Avg. Months Since Moving In
HCV	30	95
Public Housing	24	91
Project Based Section 8 Vouchers	107	95

²¹ HUD, Picture of Subsidized Households Dataset, https://www.huduser.gov/portal/datasets/assths.html#2009-2021_query

²² Ithaca Voice, May 13, 2021, <https://ithacavoice.com/2021/05/brick-wall-after-brick-wall-after-brick-wall/>

Stakeholders also noted that housing inspectors have allowed substandard housing because of the lack of available housing options. Data on the quality of Section 8 housing is generally not available, but the 2016 survey by the Tompkins County Department of Planning and Sustainability found that 4% of non-student residents respondents said they were extremely dissatisfied with the quality and condition of their housing.

Summary

- Subsidies and public housing are in short supply.
- The quality and availability of housing accepting subsidies is limited.
- The process for accessing and keeping subsidies can be difficult for some individuals to manage.

Affordable Housing

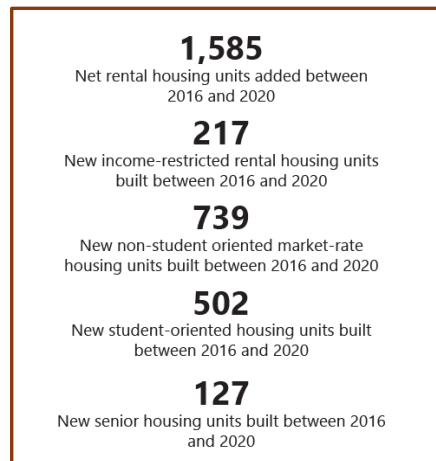
The most frequently mentioned challenge associated with moving people out of homelessness was the lack of affordable housing. Stakeholders said the deficiency in affordable housing prevented people from moving out of emergency shelter, transitional housing, and permanent supportive housing. Interview participants also remarked on the lack of affordable housing. One interview participant, who rotated between couch-surfing, staying with her boyfriend, and living in her car, said she would prefer to have an apartment of her own, but did not think she could afford it. Another interview participant, who was currently couch-surfing, said he needed to find housing in the city because he did not have transportation, but was skeptical of being able to find affordable housing.

Resources Available

Tompkins County is home to 1,087 housing units created through the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit Program (LIHTC) at 18 different project sites²³. Of these, 738 units are set-aside for low-income households. The most recent LIHTC project, the second phase of Poet's Landing in Dryden, was developed in 2017.

The 2016 Housing Strategy for Tompkins County proposed the development of 100 Single Room Only (SRO) beds reserved for under 30% of the Area Median Income (AMI). As of the 2020 Housing Snapshot, only 4 SRO beds had been developed.

In addition to the SRO beds, the Housing Strategy recommended the development of 200 new rentals per year affordable for those earning up to 100 AMI, for a total of 2,000 new rentals by 2025. The 2020 Housing Snapshot indicated that 217 new income-restricted housing units had been added between 2016 and 2020. In 2021, Arthaus added 84 units of affordable rentals (50-80% AMI) to the housing market, in addition to the 40 units earmarked for homeless youth and youth formerly in foster care. To date, a total of 301 affordable rentals have been added, far behind the goal of 200 new rentals per year.



²³ LIHTC database, retrieved from: <https://lihtc.huduser.gov/>

The county also continues to lag behind in the construction of affordable housing for ownership. Only 58 units with assessed values of \$150,000-\$199,999 were built between 2016-2020, far behind the goal of 125 units per year.

Fair Market Rents are extremely high in Tompkins County. The only counties with higher FMRs are located in, and around, New York City.

Table 13. Fair Market Rent: Tompkins County/Ithaca NY MSA

Year	Efficiency/Studio	One Bedroom	Two Bedroom	Three Bedroom	Four Bedroom
2022	\$1,053	\$1,127	\$1,365	\$1,753	\$1,851
2021	\$980	\$1,048	\$1,269	\$1,619	\$1,812

Utilization

Tompkins County has a very low rental vacancy rate. The latest Census data puts the rental vacancy rate at 4.0% and the homeowner vacancy rate at 1.9%. Of the estimated 19,614 rental units in the county asking cash rent, approximately one-third (N=6,298) are below the 2021 FMR for a studio. Assuming a 4% vacancy rate for rentals in this price range, about 252 units below the FMR would be available for rent.

Table 14. Number of Rental Units by Gross Rent, Tompkins County

Gross Rent	Estimated Number	Estimated Percent
Less than \$400	484	2.5%
\$400-\$599	604	3.1%
\$600-\$799	1673	8.5%
\$800-\$999	3,537	18.0%
\$1,000-\$1,249	4,006	20.4%
\$1,250 to \$1,499	3,496	17.8%
\$1,500 to \$1,999	3,750	19.1%
\$2,000 or more	2,064	10.5%

A soon to be released book on homelessness sought to determine the cause of regional differences in the prevalence of homelessness²⁴. The authors concluded that *homelessness is a housing problem*. Their analysis shows that rent costs and vacancy rates, and not the prevalence of mental illness, poverty rates, or generous public assistance, are the most credible explanations of regional variations in homelessness. In Appendix C, the vacancy rates in each of the surrounding and comparable CoCs are compared with homelessness rates. For the most part, CoCs with lower rental vacancy rates had higher rates of homelessness.

²⁴ Colburn, G., & Aldern, C. (2022). *Homelessness is a Housing Problem: How Structural Factors Explain US Patterns*. University of California Press.

While Tompkins County’s housing market is tight, there are several bright spots. The Housing Strategy has a clearly defined path for housing development and provides regular updates on progress to keep the county on course. The county also has a robust group of organizations collaborating to obtain funding, create housing, and provide support services to newly housed people.

Summary

- Low vacancy rates and high rent costs are a fundamental barrier in moving people from homelessness to housing.
- Creation of additional affordable housing units is vital to disrupt the homelessness cycle.

Support Services

Overall, Tompkins County has a robust support services network. However, both stakeholders and interview participants mentioned several areas where additional support is needed. Stakeholders most frequently said there was a need for more mental health services and detox services. They also mentioned the need for more robust navigational and support services for people transitioning from homelessness to housing, and more follow-up support after placement in permanent housing. One stakeholder said, *“I think one of the biggest disappointments that people are running into is there is no one to help with the burden of paperwork. Take Conifer Properties. They own multiple apartment complexes in the county, yet each one has a separate application. Five of those, plus one apiece for any other housing can add up to a lot. Add that to a huge application for public services, no transportation or assistance to transportation, needing to go to several different places in one day to accomplish everything – people are overwhelmed. Someone whose situation is already tenuous might be crushed by it.”*

The most frequently mentioned barrier are the system’s rules for accessing housing. Stakeholders frequently mentioned the complicated application for assistance required for accessing temporary housing assistance. Stakeholders said the process is a challenge to navigate, and advocacy and navigation support is critical for most homeless people. One stakeholder said, *“I see Tompkins County as being very service rich. There are a lot of opportunities to get services. The barrier is more a fear or reluctance to access services because of distrust with the system. There is a difficulty of accessing services without an advocate. It’s so decentralized. You have to go to a different place for different things – clothing, food, health care, to apply for services, and you’re constantly jumping through hoops. It causes frustration and people give up. It’s easy for services to say ‘they didn’t follow through,’ but it’s literally impossible. Either have one location where service providers can be in one space, or have a case manager that can either transport and do everything from A to Z to help someone through whole process. Doing it alone is completely overwhelming and next to impossible.”*

Stakeholders remarked on the lack of community cohesion around housing and homelessness. Stakeholders said that the Housing First philosophy is not universally embraced or understood within the housing and support services continuum. Some stakeholders suggested that Housing First has been “reinterpreted” based on the services being provided. Stakeholders also said that the lack of a coherent and consistent approach to the encampments has been a barrier to eliminating homelessness in the county. There was also mention of a lack of will in the community for building affordable housing and subsidized housing. Stakeholders also said the tacit acceptance of a level of homelessness in the community along with the resistance to building affordable housing was a disappointment. In addition,

stakeholders said leaving “grant money on the table” due to a lack of capacity to expand housing services was discouraging.

Stakeholders mentioned that transportation and communication challenges can create significant barriers for people to access housing and assistance. They said that it can be difficult to maintain contact with unhoused individuals, which can result in people being sanctioned or missing opportunities for support and service.

Opportunities

Information from stakeholders, people with lived experience with homelessness, local data, and a review of housing models have been used to identify some key opportunities for addressing homelessness in Tompkins County.

Emergency Shelter/SRO

The data clearly show that the size of the county’s current emergency shelter is insufficient to meet the number of people who are homeless. The county is consistently paying thousands of dollars a night to pay for motel rooms, and stakeholders suggest this model makes it more difficult to provide services to those individuals. This problem is not unique to Tompkins County. Cities across the country have been attempting to address the same issue by expanding the idea of what emergency shelter is.

- Similar to the Learning Web’s scattered site apartments, Denver, Colorado’s three-year shelter expansion plan²⁵ includes a strategy to “master lease” apartments as temporary sheltering environments coupled with rapid rehousing and diversion strategies to support a transition in place model.
- Other communities are converting hotels and motels to housing. Essex Junction, VT has successfully converted three hotel properties to permanent housing. The town’s most recent conversion project took a 113-room hotel and converted it to 68 one- and two-bedroom units with kitchenettes within five months (including permitting, acquisition, and rehabilitation). The facility has community space which allows for on-site support services.²⁶
- Comparable to Second Wind’s cottages, Clearwater, FL built cottages using 20-foot shipping containers to create 3-room units for previously homeless residents.²⁷

The county’s Housing Strategy’s approach to address the emergency shelter population is the development of 100 SROs. However, only four SROs have been created since 2016. Tompkins County has the opportunity to decide whether to continue housing people in motels while additional housing is created, to expand the current shelter, or develop a different model to address this vulnerable population. Stakeholders offered a variety of suggestions to address homelessness in the county. Some stakeholders advanced the idea of a sanctioned encampment to address the challenges associated with the encampments. Other stakeholders suggested buying trailer parks, creating more tiny houses following the Second Wind model, or creating an opportunity for people to “homestead” on a piece of property. Stakeholders also suggested some version of a youth shelter is needed.

²⁵ https://www.denvergov.org/content/dam/denvergov/Portals/housing-resources/documents/drh-three-year-shelter-strategy_web.pdf

²⁶ https://endhomelessness.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Susans-Place-H2H-Case-Study_8-30-21.pdf

²⁷ <https://pinellashope.org/>

Low-Threshold Shelter

Stakeholders frequently mentioned the need for a low-threshold shelter. They suggested a low-threshold shelter could potentially meet the need of a small, but persistent number of homeless individuals who are resistant to other housing options including people who are unwilling to be sober, have pets, or have been sanctioned. Low-threshold shelters require a significant investment in staffing and should include a team able to provide overnight care, case management, physical and substance use treatment and support, and housing navigation. Other options related to a low-threshold shelter are drop-in centers. Most examples of successful low-threshold work are located in large cities. Some models include:

- Urban Pathways of New York provides a drop-in center which offers 24-hour on-site services including meals, clothing, and showers, as well as respite beds. The staff also offer case management, housing placement support, and referrals. Their programs provide transitional housing which offers intensive case management and housing placement assistance in a low-barrier model.
- BronxWorks provides “Living Room” support to street homeless adults. The Living Room is a 24-hour drop-in center where people can do their laundry, take showers, eat, and get additional help.²⁸
- Boston recently set a goal of helping homeless individuals with mental health issues and substance use disorders transition from encampments to living indoors in a safe and supportive environment. To this end, they have brought more low-threshold beds online and developed a guidance document to support the process of providing overnight, low-threshold spaces.²⁹

Enhanced Navigation Support/Case Management

Navigating the system to attain housing support is challenging, particularly so for homeless individuals. Some navigational support is provided by volunteers and other community service providers, but intentional, funded navigator positions coupled with coordinated outreach could potentially better serve clients in need. Providing intensive case management support and housing assistance to individuals in the emergency shelter may address the cyclical homelessness found in this population. Also, where possible, the system should be reformed to stop punishing people for being unable to follow through on the rules and requirements.

Heightened Outreach to Couch-surfers

There is potentially a large population of people who are precariously sheltered and are not being effectively served by the current homeless and housing system. Outreach to young people and people of color, in particular, to identify those most at risk for homelessness, or in unsafe living conditions, could prevent longer-term negative outcomes.

Added Capacity to Current Housing and Service Providers

Adding permanent supportive housing in the community will require additional capacity in both housing and service provider agencies. Stakeholders noted that although they had identified both the need, and funding, for housing and support services, they did not have the internal capacity to move forward. A comprehensive plan for increasing staffing and capacity for providers may remove some stumbling blocks to providing effective supportive housing. With added capacity, increased permanent supportive

²⁸ <https://bronxworks.org/our-services/adult-and-family-homeless-services/adult-shelter-services/>

²⁹ <https://www.boston.gov/sites/default/files/file/2021/07/OLTS%20Practice%20Guidance.pdf>

housing focusing on mental health, trauma, and other physical health conditions could disrupt the cycle of homelessness for some individuals and families.

Direct Monetary Support

Stakeholders suggested that direct assistance in dollars, similar to the Rapid Re-Housing program, would be an effective way to address some aspects of homelessness. One stakeholder said it would be useful to be able to “step” monetary assistance down to allow people to gradually become more self-sufficient rather than having a fiscal “cliff”.

Continued Efforts to Build Affordable Housing

The county is on track to increase affordable housing over the next few years, but with the county’s increasing population, and the population cycling in and out of the homelessness system, there will continue to be more housing needed beyond the current and near-term builds. NIMBY (Not In My Back Yard) remains a challenge for organizations trying to place affordable housing. More communication and messaging on the need and importance of housing may help combat this issue and generate more interest and support.

Conclusion

Information from stakeholders and people with lived experience coupled with HMIS and PIT data indicate Tompkins County needs additional housing across the spectrum to end homelessness. There is a persistent need for emergency shelter throughout the year, and the lack of affordable housing creates a significant delay in moving people out of emergency shelter. The county has abundant service providers supporting the homeless community, with mental health care, domestic violence assistance, substance use disorder care, and parenting education and support. Despite the richness of the service community, the capacity of these agencies to take on additional housing projects is limited.

Stakeholders provided several ideas on the best ways to address homelessness, from expanding the shelter to developing new housing initiatives. People with lived experience with homelessness clearly and consistently shared that all they wanted was a home, a job, and the opportunity to live a normal life. The key to success will likely lie in efforts across the housing continuum and an embrace of the understanding that people who are homeless want what everyone wants – a safe and secure home.

Appendix A. Interview Guides

Stakeholders

1. Based on your experience, what are the primary gaps in the current shelter and housing inventory? (emergency, transitional, supported permanent, other, etc.)
2. What are the primary gaps in support services, particularly for people who are homeless, or at risk for homelessness?
3. What would you say are the characteristics of the people in our community who are homeless or at risk for being homeless? Are there specific demographic characteristics (e.g. age group, race/ethnicity, addiction, other)? Are there groups that think are more at risk for being homelessness or may be more vulnerable if they are homeless?
4. Which homeless population(s) should be prioritized in developing housing and support (e.g. youth, families with children, people with addictions, etc.)? What are your reasons for that? (e.g. larger population, greater vulnerability, less access to resources/availability of housing)
5. What do you think would be required to ensure that housing is used effectively (e.g. program requirements, structure, location, support services)?
6. What do you think are the barriers for homeless people to accept housing services or to maintain housing?
7. Tell me about your experience with the coordinated entry process for unhoused people. Do you think it works well? How successful do you think the process is in moving people into shelter in a timely manner? What are the main challenges with the process?
8. What successes can you point to with respect to emergency, transitional, and supportive permanent housing in the county? What do you think has worked especially well? What do you think were the main reasons for those being successful?
9. What do you think have been the most significant disappointments with respect to emergency, transitional, and supportive permanent housing in the county? What do you think hasn't worked as well as expected? What do you think were the main reasons for those projects/plans not working out?
10. What have you found to be the most challenging aspects of diverting or preventing people from homelessness? What have you found that works when preventing/diverting people from being homeless?
11. An integral aspect of this process is to interview people who are currently unhoused or have recently been. Are there any people you think would be willing to speak with me for the project that you connect me with? I will be providing them with an incentive in appreciation for their time and assistance.

People with Lived Experience

1. How long have you been (were you) homeless?
2. Where are you currently sleeping? (Where were you sleeping when you were homeless?)
3. Tell me about how you first became homeless – what happened?
4. What has been (was) the hardest part about being homeless?
5. What has been (was) the hardest part about trying to get housing?
6. Have you been homeless more than once in your life?
7. What is/was hard about keeping your housing?
8. What kind of housing would you most like to have? Where would it be? What would it be like?

Appendix B. List of Comparative CoCs

Elmira/Steuben, Allegany, Livingston, Chemung, Schuyler Counties CoC	NY-501
Syracuse, Auburn/Onondaga, Oswego, Cayuga Counties CoC	NY-505
Binghamton, Union Town/Broome, Otsego, Chenango, Delaware, Cortland, Tioga Counties CoC	NY-511
Wayne, Ontario, Seneca, Yates Counties CoC	NY-513
Utica, Rome/Oneida, Madison Counties CoC	NY-518
Columbia, Greene Counties CoC	NY-519
Franklin, Essex Counties CoC	NY-520
Glens Falls, Saratoga Springs/Saratoga, Washington, Warren, Hamilton Counties CoC	NY-523
Kingston/Ulster County CoC	NY-608

Appendix C. Couch-Surfer Estimate and Methodology: Census Data

2010 Census Decennial 10% sample data was accessed through IPUMS USA³⁰ to determine the number of non-relatives living in households in Tompkins County. Using the RELATED variable, it is possible to identify the number of number of people in households who were “other non-relatives” and filter out all close relatives, housemates or roommates, unmarried partners, and foster children. In addition, using the GQTYPE (group quarters) variable makes it possible to filter out all people living in group quarters including correctional facilities, nursing homes, and college dormitories.

The number of non-relatives by age group are provided below.

Age group	Other non-relatives Estimated N	Other non-relatives Margin of Error
0-15	110	58-202
16-17	70	34-144
18-24	320	230-446
25-30	90	45-171
31-40	110	63-199
41-50	80	46-160
51-60	70	35-143
61 +	60	31-138
Total	910	785-1,134

RELATED response options	GQTYPE response options
101: Head/Householder	NA (non-group quarters households)
201: Spouse	Institution (1990, 2000, ACS/PRCS)
301: Child	Correctional institutions
302: Adopted Child	Mental institutions
303: Stepchild	Institutions for the elderly, handicapped, and poor
401: Child-in-law	Non-institutional GQ
501: Parent	Military
601: Parent-in-Law	College dormitory
701: Sibling	Rooming house
901: Grandchild	Other non-institutional GQ and unknown
1001: Other Relatives	
1114: Unmarried Partner	
1115: Housemate/Roommate	
1241: Roomers/boarders/lodgers	
1260: Other non-relatives	

³⁰ Steven Ruggles, Sarah Flood, Sophia Foster, Ronald Goeken, Jose Pacas, Megan Schouweiler and Matthew Sobek. IPUMS USA: Version 11.0 [2010 Decennial Census 10%]. Minneapolis, MN: IPUMS, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.18128/D010.V11.0>

Appendix D. Vacancy Rates by Rates of Homelessness

CoC/County		Rental vacancy rate	# Homeless per 10,000 Pop.	# Served (ES, SH, TH) per 10,000 Pop.
NY-501	<i>Elmira/Steuben, Allegany, Livingston, Chemung, Schuyler Counties</i>		8.29	33.3
	Allegany	9.4%		
	Chemung	8.7%		
	Livingston	4.0%		
	Schuyler	9.0%		
	Steuben	6.3%		
NY-505	<i>Syracuse, Auburn/Onondaga, Oswego, Cayuga Counties</i>		9.22	54.5
	Cayuga	5.9%		
	Onondaga	8.5%		
	Oswego	5.4%		
NY-510	<i>Ithaca/Tompkins County</i>	4.0%	12.58	54.5
NY-511	<i>Binghamton, Union Town/Broome, Otsego, Chenango, Delaware, Cortland, Tioga Counties</i>		7.14	38.2
	Broome	8.1%		
	Chenango	3.6%		
	Cortland	3.6%		
	Delaware	6.9%		
	Otsego	9.3%		
	Tioga	8.6%		
NY-513	<i>Wayne, Ontario, Seneca, Yates Counties</i>		11.47	31.3
	Ontario	7.8%		
	Seneca	4.1%		
	Wayne	4.9%		
	Yates	9.6%		
NY-518	<i>Utica, Rome/Oneida, Madison Counties</i>		6.36	20.8
	Madison	5.5%		
	Oneida	6.9%		
NY-519	<i>Columbia, Greene Counties</i>		15.52	24.3
	Columbia	3.5%		
	Greene	6.7%		
NY-520	<i>Franklin, Essex Counties</i>		4.59	18.4
	Essex	7.0%		
	Franklin	3.6%		
NY-523	<i>Glens Falls, Saratoga Springs/Saratoga, Washington, Warren, Hamilton Counties</i>		8.38	28.3
	Hamilton	N/A		
	Saratoga	5.3%		
	Warren	6.9%		
	Washington	5.2%		
NY-608	<i>Kingston/Ulster County</i>	3.8%	24.14	55.1