



People's Emergency Center

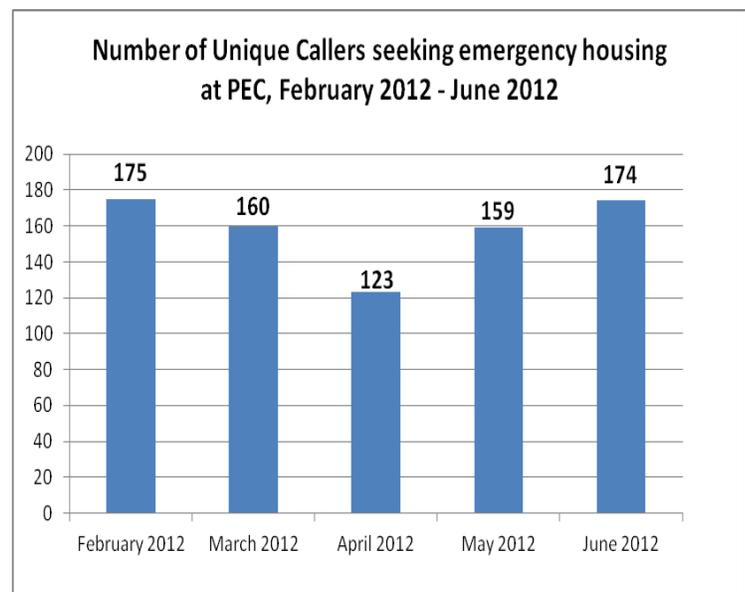
Nurturing Families, Strengthening Neighborhoods, Driving Change.

Policy
Brief

Restore Pennsylvania's Homeless Assistance Program

October 2012

During the cold of last February, Naomi called the People's Emergency Center (PEC) seeking emergency housing for herself and her two children but was turned away due to lack of space. She tried contacting the county and other family providers, but was told to make her own arrangements or go on a waiting list. Naomi was not the first or the last parent who would get turned away—five or six other families each day get turned away by PEC. Turned away, Naomi faced moving her children from house to house. This situation is a daily event repeated throughout Pennsylvania.



Summary: The Homeless Assistance

Program helps local communities end homelessness for thousands of Pennsylvanians. Unfortunately, there is less affordable housing available, less funding for emergency housing, and more people trying to get into emergency housing than ever before. For 2013, legislators are urged to restore funds to HAP that were lost in previous budgets and to use those funds to produce performance outcomes and to improve the quality of care for children, families, and individuals who seek help.

Introduction: In communities throughout Pennsylvania, emergency housing plays an important role in stabilizing families and individuals in crisis. Local communities combine Pennsylvania's Homeless Assistance Program funding (HAP) with other local funding to provide temporary housing and services for these families and individuals.

Most emergency housing residents receive much more than shelter. They are connected to permanent housing, job training, employment, and, for those fleeing domestic violence, protection from an abuser. Emergency housing case workers help children stay connected to school and provide them with mentoring, tutoring, afterschool help, and, if needed, behavioral health services.

A part of the housing market: why emergency housing is needed

Emergency housing plays an important role in the rental housing market as it can offer temporary housing to people with very low incomes, i.e., \$17,000 annually.

Unfortunately, there has been a significant decline in affordable housing throughout Pennsylvania. According to the Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphiaⁱ, there are fewer rental units for households with extremely low incomes of less than \$17,000 per year, and a greater number of these households throughout the Commonwealth. More specifically, the Federal Reserve Bank also wrote that:

- Pennsylvania has a shortage of 223,000 units of affordable and available rental units for households earning \$17,000 or less per year.
- There are only 43 affordable and available units per 100 households with incomes under \$17,000.
- There was a 4% increase in the number of households who have incomes under \$17,000 between the 2000 U.S. Census and the 2005-06 American Community Survey,ⁱⁱ demonstrating increasing demand.

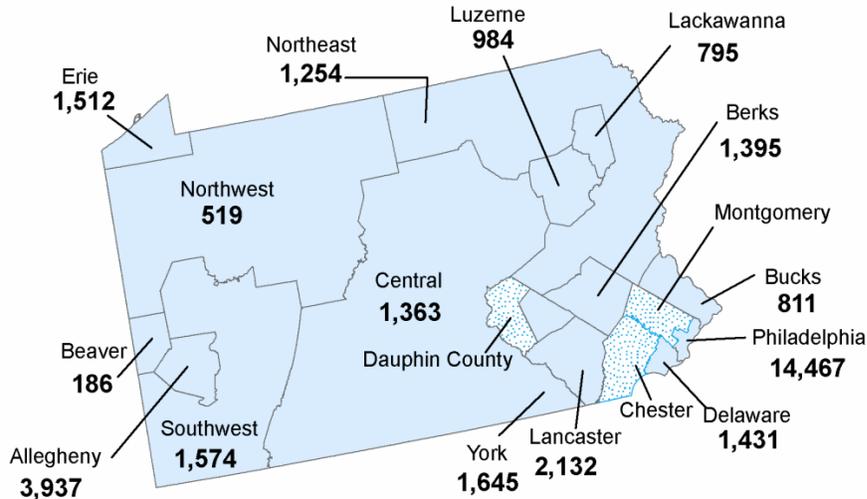
In addition, Pennsylvania's Consolidated Planⁱⁱⁱ recently reported that *"The availability of family-sized, rental housing stock has declined by nearly 100,000 units over the last decade."*^{iv}

Furthermore, the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities wrote^v *"In Pennsylvania, 327,930 low-income renter households pay more than half their monthly cash income for housing costs. On average, these households have incomes of \$850 and pay housing costs of \$770, leaving only \$80 to pay for other necessities. About 45 percent of these cost burdened renters are elderly or people with disabilities, while 24 percent are families with children."* Coupled with the fact that many of Pennsylvania's housing authorities have waiting lists, the predatory lending debacle, and other economic factors, it is perhaps not too surprising that homelessness and the demand for emergency housing is increasing.

Pennsylvania's use of emergency housing:

- More than 34,000 Pennsylvanians spent at least one night in either emergency or transitional housing in FY 2011.^{vi}
- On any given night, an average of 13,000 Pennsylvanians will sleep in emergency housing. However, most people stay less than six months.^{vii}
- Pennsylvanians are homeless in all communities:

34,004 Persons Experiencing Homelessness Served in Pennsylvania, 2011*



Increased demand for emergency housing^{viii}: A three-year trend shows that 13 of the 18 Pennsylvania reporting regions expanded their emergency housing unit inventory to meet growing demand.^{ix} In addition, both rural and urban regions are experiencing increases in demand for emergency housing:

- Since 2008, Philadelphia has experienced a 339% increase in the demand for shelter by families.^x
- Rural counties, including Tioga^{xi}, Lebanon^{xii}, Bradford^{xiii}, Franklin^{xiv} and Montour^{xv}, are opening up new emergency shelters to meet a rising demand or are turning people away.
- The Erie Times^{xvi} reported “The seven emergency shelters funded by Erie County are regularly filled to capacity ... with the homeless staying twice as long as they did only 18 months ago.”

Emergency housing’s successful outcomes: Emergency housing achieves:

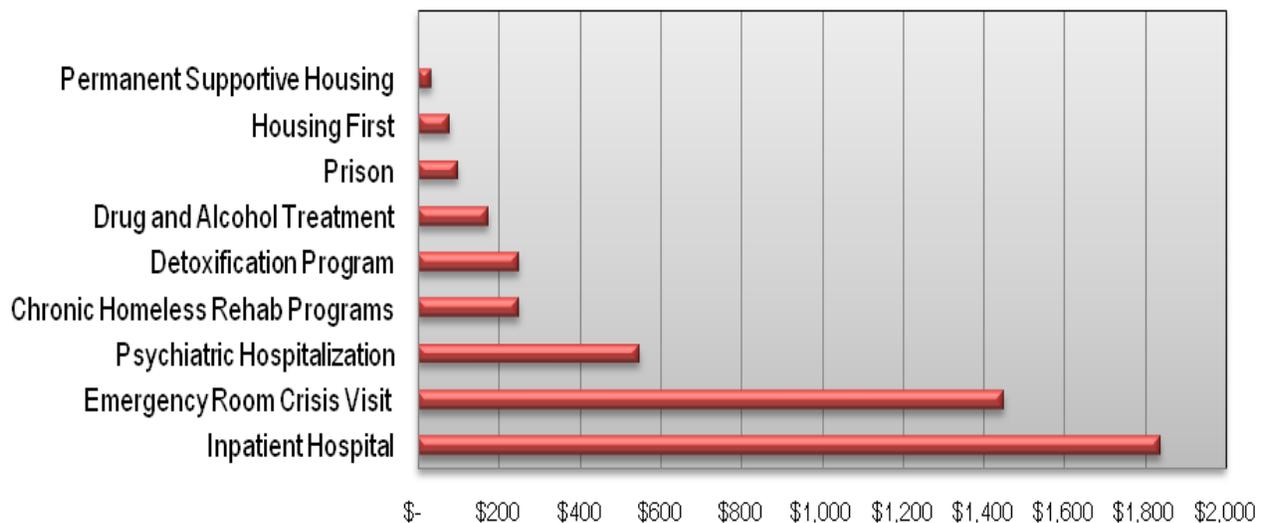
- Cost Savings: Children connected to the child welfare system who are living in emergency housing have lower rates of foster care placement than children only connected to the child welfare system – suggesting that emergency housing is protective against foster care placement for children,^{xvii} thus saving thousands of dollars and keeping families together;
- Protection: Safety and security to children and mothers fleeing domestic violence;
- Jobs: Connects thousands of adults to employment^{xviii};
- Reduces risk associated with child and youth homelessness: Connects more than 9,000 children and youth^{xix} to education, health care, and more;
- Short-term support: Provides temporary housing to 34,000 Pennsylvanians^{xx}.

HAP funding: Since fiscal year 2007-2008, the Pennsylvania General Assembly has reduced funding to HAP.

Pennsylvania's Homeless Assistance Funding						
	2007-2008 (in thousands)	2008-2009 (in thousands)	2009-2010 (in thousands)	2010-2011 (in thousands)	2011-2012 (in thousands)	2012-2013 (in thousands)
	Actual	Actual	Actual	Available	Enacted	Available
Funds	\$26,700	\$26,613	\$23,023	\$22,606	\$20,551	\$18,500

Analysis:

- **Funding decreases to HAP may increase costs elsewhere:**
 - **Spending longer amounts of time in shelter:**
 - County executives have asserted that funding cuts would decrease the number of case managers who work to stabilize individuals and families and to get them into housing.
 - Franklin County's Public Opinion^{xxi} reported *"Not only are the shelters full, but the homeless who fill them are staying longer, according to local shelter officials."*
 - **Costs shift to other systems:** Homelessness is expensive^{xxii} when considering hospitalization, police response, and other resources that are used. In addition:
 - The average annual cost of child's homelessness in Pennsylvania is approximately \$33,943 per child^{xxiii} more than a child who is not homeless when considering costs of foster care, health care, and other costs.
 - Chronic homelessness is very expensive. According to Project H.O.M.E.^{xxiv}, the daily costs of providing services to chronically homeless who live on the street is far more expensive than other interventions like prison, psychiatric hospitalization, and emergency room visits (see graph below).



- **Quality:** Administrators and consumers of HAP are not asked to demonstrate performance outcomes with the current minimal reporting requirements.^{xxv} Current HAP reporting requirements ask only for numbers and demographic information of people served. However, other funding streams require outcomes, i.e., Did they get into permanent housing? Did they get a job? It would not be burdensome if providers are asked to report on these outcomes because they already collect this data.

Recommendations: Emergency housing provides an invaluable service to communities and families throughout the Commonwealth. The Corbett Administration and the General Assembly are encouraged to take action:

1. **Protect children, families, and individuals:** Restore the \$2 million funding cut to the Homeless Assistance Program (HAP) for fiscal year 2013 – 2014 to serve the growing numbers of homeless children, families, and individuals.
2. **Strengthen Accountability:** The Administration should use HAP funds to improve quality of emergency housing to produce positive outcomes, like connecting people to permanent housing and employment, or improving child well-being.
3. **Best Practices:** Convene emergency housing providers to learn best practices that will improve quality.

The **People’s Emergency Center’s** mission is to nurture families, strengthen neighborhoods and drive change in West Philadelphia. Through a community of more than 200 housing units and three educational centers offering job training, parenting and early childhood education, and technology coursework, PEC seeks to change the life trajectory for the women and children who seek its services and inspire them to aspire to new heights. PEC community development programs respond to community needs and build on neighborhood assets to help bridge the digital divide, expand mixed-income housing opportunities, stimulate economic growth, create wealth, and improve the quality of life for all West Philadelphia residents.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT:

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ⁱ Mierzwa, Erin, Nelson and Newburger: Affordability and Availability of Rental Housing in Pennsylvania. March 2010.

ⁱⁱ IBID, p. 28.

ⁱⁱⁱ Commonwealth of Pennsylvania: Consolidated Plan Federal Fiscal Years 2009-2013. February 2009.

^{iv} IBID, p. 5

^v Center for Budget and Policy Priorities: Pennsylvania Federal Rental Assistance Fact Sheet, <http://www.cbpp.org/files/4-13-11hou-PA.pdf>

^{vi} People’s Emergency Center: The Rest of the Story, October 2012.

^{vii} Culhane, Dennis, et al: The Patterns and Costs of Services Use among Homeless Families. October 2011.

^{viii} It should be noted that challenges with data collection may be a reason why the number of available units increases or decreases.

^{ix} People’s Emergency Center: Housing Inventory Count and Point in Time Relating to Pennsylvania’s Families Experiencing Homelessness. April 2012.

^x Dainette Mintz: Testimony to City Council Committee of the Whole. April, 30, 2012

^{xi} Cheryl Clarke: Tioga County has ‘permanent’ shelter. Williamsport Sun-Gazette. November 4, 2012.

^{xii} Chris Sholly: Lebanon HOPES emergency shelter for homeless busy, Lebanon Daily News November 2, 2012.

^{xiii} Loewenstein, James: Skyrocketing Rent in Bradford County: Influx of Gas Workers Creating Shortage of Affordable Housing. The Daily Review, January 22, 2010.

^{xiv} Vicky Taylor: Homeless in Franklin County: Shelters full, options limited. Public Opinion. 2012.

^{xv} Schwartz, Susan: Refuge must refuse many. Press Enterprise, September 23, 2012

^{xvi} Gerry Weiss: Erie church opens overnight shelter to help homeless, Erie Times, November 28, 2012.

^{xvii} Perlman, S. & Fantuzzo, J. (2012, July 26). Timing of first foster care placement: A population-based study. Paper presented at the National Research Conference on Child and Family Programs and Policy. Bridgewater, MA.

^{xviii} The agencies listed at this site provide employment and case management services to individuals who are experiencing homelessness in Philadelphia:

<http://oneneighborhood.org/agencies/programs?filter0=6>

^{xix} People’s Emergency Center: The Rest of the Story, October 2012.

^{xx} IBID, p. 5.

^{xxii} National Alliance to End Homelessness: http://www.endhomelessness.org/pages/cost_of_homelessness

^{xxiv} Project H.O.M.E., op cit, p. 7.

^{xxv} Current reporting requirements ask for numbers of people served and demographic information. Providers are required to submit a one-page summary of this information. The requirements do not require outcomes, i.e., finding permanent housing, employment, etc.