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Does Philadelphia Need to expand its Homeless Prevention Program?

What is homelessness prevention?

- Homelessness prevention is a set of strategies to help low-income households resolve a housing crisis that could otherwise lead to homelessnessⁱ. Prevention provides short-term financial assistance and services to prevent individuals and families from becoming homeless.
- Homelessness prevention has proven to **save public dollars and serve more people**. Many programs have costs per household in the \$2,000 to \$5,000 range, compared to Philadelphia construction costs of \$300,000 per unit that would serve one household.
- Homelessness prevention **succeeds** in helping people **avoid** coming into emergency housing.
- Once housing stability has been obtained, people have a **more stable** foundation from which to regain and maintain physical and behavioral health, education, employment, family stability and community.
- **What it is not:** mortgage foreclosure funding or funding for rental housing rehab and construction



What is the issue in Philadelphia?

- **Demand outpaces supply and forces costs into other systems.** Homeless families impact emergency room visits, school participation, remedial education, and more.ⁱⁱ
- **Children fall behind.** The longer children are homeless, the more they fall behind academically, and the sicker homeless babies becomeⁱⁱⁱ.
- **Hinders Philadelphia's progress:** Lack of a scalable prevention program **hinders the Administration's progress** to use more **cost-effective programming** and compels it to rely on **more expensive** interventions. The City successfully moves more than 1,400 homeless families toward stability, but more people need services that emergency housing has resources to provide, and, not every homeless family needs to be in emergency housing. Unfortunately, families cannot access services until they enter shelter.
- **Demand** for emergency and affordable housing **is extraordinarily high:**
 - About 100 persons per day are asking for emergency housing^{iv} and the overwhelming majority do not get in
 - 2,000 Philadelphia School District students and their families are homeless but not in shelter^v nor are they receiving help



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- The City's prevention program is woefully underfunded as only \$970,000 is budgeted for prevention using revenues from the federal Community Service Block Grant and the City's Housing Trust Fund, and these funds are exhausted before the end of its fiscal year.
- Only 810 households were helped in 2016, including 170 with mortgage assistance. Unfortunately, mortgage assistance is not the same as homelessness prevention as practically 99 percent of all homeless persons were renters.

Who benefits most by homelessness prevention?

- **Children** - HUD's national evaluation^{vi} of its program, which included Philadelphia, reported that "Children accounted for 45 percent of people served by HPRP prevention programs." In addition, children who experienced homelessness for the first time as a toddler evidenced poorer performance than their peers who had never been homeless.^{vii} Not housing these children leads to increased future expenditures.
- The City's **homeless budget** – homeless prevention is **less costly** and **highly successful** and would be expected to reduce pressure on more costly services.
 - In Philadelphia, developing one unit of affordable housing can cost \$300,000 or more.
 - NYC's HOMEBASE prevention program costs \$2,000 on average per household.

What is the cost of doing nothing?

- **Damage to children:** Children suffer trauma. They miss school and achieve lower scores on standardized tests. This leads to higher costs for remedial education.
- **Health risks of babies:** More than 500 babies per year end up in shelter. They tend to have higher early intervention costs, emergency room utilization, expensive health interventions like longer stays in Neo-Intensive Care Units. Much of these costs could be avoided.
- **Increased trauma and domestic violence.**
- **Driving up funding costs for other health and human services.**





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Does prevention work?

- **Yes!** Overwhelmingly, the **research^{viii} shows positive impacts** of homeless prevention. For example, research shows that housing subsidies protect against homelessness.^{ix} Reducing homelessness to a fraction of its current level over time would be easy if subsidies were available for every household that needed them.^x
- **Ends homelessness:** Philadelphia ensured that 95% of households served avoided or ended homelessness from FY 2010-2012 with its prevention programs.
- **Cost effective:** Philadelphia's modest prevention program spent an average amount of assistance per household of \$865 for an estimated average cost savings to the City of \$4,318,650 (based on a number of persons staying in shelter for 90 days)^{xi}.
- **Reduces shelter usage:** New York City's HOMEBASE^{xii} lowered shelter usage and cost less while successfully housing families experiencing homelessness. Rolston, et. al (2013) established a 6.5% reduction of shelter entry of families enrolled in Homebase (and a reduction of length of stay for those who entered shelter)
- **Veterans:** In one veterans' program, of 950 veterans who had left the program 77 percent were stably housed.^{xiii}

What is FSPN advocating for?

- Philadelphia should pilot service homeless prevention models over the next three years, build the capacity of the system to implement these models, test, evaluate and provide feedback. These pilot programs should be community-based prevention programs in key geographical locations providing targeted homelessness prevention and housing stabilization services to 300 families and individuals a year based on evidence about who is most likely to become homeless

Action Steps:

- The City Council's "**Housing, Neighborhood Development, and the Homeless**" Committee need to come together to support these proposals. Contact them at:
 - Councilman & Chair Allan Domb 215-686-3414
 - Councilwoman & Vice Chair Jannie Blackwell 215-686-3418
 - Councilwoman Cindy Bass 215-686-3424
 - Councilwoman Helen Gym 215-686-3420



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- Councilwoman Cherelle Parker 215-686-3454
 - Councilwoman Maria Quinones Sanchez 215-686-3448
 - Councilman Al Taubenberger 215-686-3440
- Don't forget: Council President Darrell Clarke 215-686-3442

ⁱ City of Philadelphia PowerPoint presentation entitled "Homeless Prevention Program" from Philadelphia Office of Supportive Housing (now named Office of Homeless Services), July 29, 2015

ⁱⁱ The Bassuk Center on Homeless and Vulnerable Children and Youth: Services Matter, 2016.

ⁱⁱⁱ Shaw, Sara: Homeless Babies in Pennsylvania, 2016

^{iv} Discussion between Phila OHS and FSPN, September 12, 2016

^v People's Emergency Center: Historic highs of the number of children and youth experiencing homelessness, December 2016

^{vi} U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Prevention Programs Funded by the Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing Program, August, 2015 <http://www.abtassociates.com/AbtAssociates/files/0a/0abd1998-7d68-4b39-8963-ff9076ad1481.pdf>

^{vii} Perlman, Staci and John Fantuzzo, Timing and influence of early experiences of child maltreatment and homelessness on children's educational well-being, 2010

^{viii} U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Prevention Programs Funded by the Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing Program, August, 2015

^{ix} Khadduri, 2008.

^x O'Flaherty 2012, 2009; Quigley, Raphael, and Smolensky 2001.

^{xi} Johnson, Bruce: Homeless Prevention programs, Powerpoint delivered July 29, 2015

^{xii} Abt Associates: Evaluation of the Homebase Community Prevention Program, 2013

^{xiii} Urban Institute: Veterans Homelessness Prevention Demonstration Evaluation Interim Report, September 2013