Differences in the Path to Shelter by Community

Family homelessness exists in every community in New York City, but the reasons why a family becomes homeless can differ greatly from one family to another, and from one community to the next. In order to increase understanding of what drives families into shelter, this section looks at the primary reasons listed on both application and shelter entry documents at the City's Prevention Assistance and Temporary Housing (PATH) center, the centralized point of entry into the family shelter system. It then examines differences in the reasons why families enter shelter by community district.

Key Findings

Over the six-month period from July–December 2014, 60% of families with children who applied for shelter were deemed eligible. This is higher than the typical monthly shelter eligibility rate during the same period, indicating that many families are forced to apply for shelter more than once before gaining entry.

The most frequent reason that families were found eligible for shelter was domestic violence (28%). By community district, the leading cause for shelter entry was split fairly evenly between eviction (30 community districts) and domestic violence (27 community districts).

While eviction accounted for 27% of all families entering shelter citywide, its importance as a driving factor for family shelter entry varied from just 9.5% of entrants in Midtown in Manhattan (M05) to 41.4% in the Bedford Park area of the Bronx (B07).

Why Families Apply for and Are Deemed Eligible for Shelter

The top three reasons for families to apply for shelter during the first half of FY 2015 were: eviction (29%), discord (28%), and domestic violence (16%).
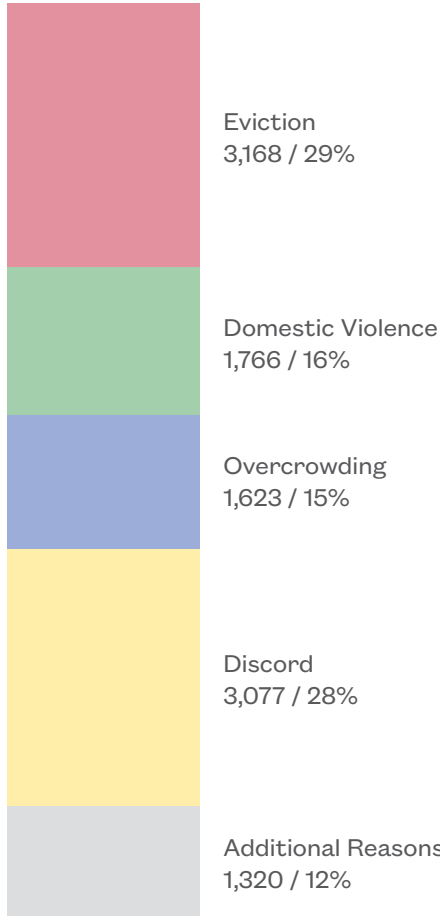
The three primary reasons that families were determined to be eligible for shelter were: domestic violence (28%), eviction (27%), and overcrowding (19%).

Over the six-month period from July–December 2014, 60% of families with children who applied for shelter were found eligible.

The six-month eligibility rate is the proportion of families who applied for shelter over a six-month period who were deemed eligible for shelter. That the six-month eligibility rate is higher than the typical monthly eligibility rate highlights how many families who are ultimately found eligible for shelter applied more than once.
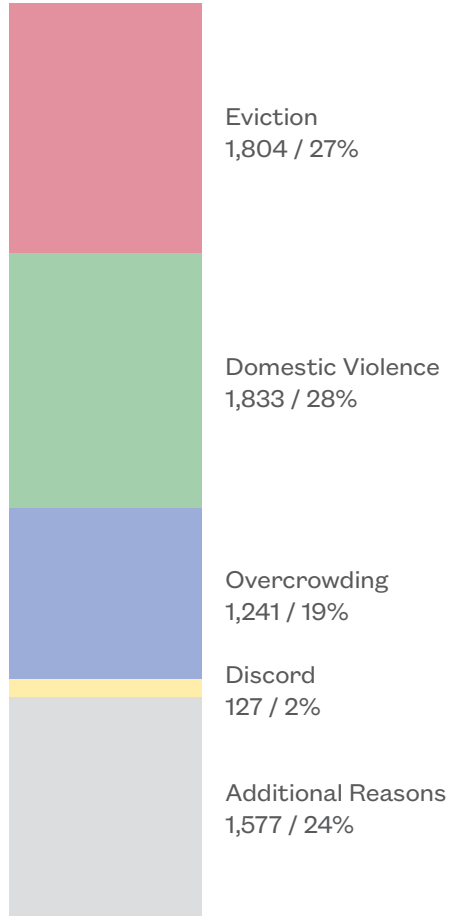
Reasons for Shelter Application, Citywide

Number and Percent of Families with Children Applying for Shelter, by Primary Reason for Application July–December 2014

Eviction
3,168 / 29%

Domestic Violence
1,766 / 16%

Overcrowding
1,623 / 15%

Discord
3,077 / 28%

Additional Reasons
1,320 / 12%

Reasons Families Found Eligible for Shelter, Citywide

Number and Percent of Families with Children Found Eligible for Shelter, by Primary Reason for Eligibility July–December 2014

Eviction
1,804 / 27%

Domestic Violence
1,833 / 28%

Overcrowding
1,241 / 19%

Discord
127 / 2%

Additional Reasons
1,577 / 24%

Note: A family's reason for application does not necessarily match their reason for eligibility. Families who applied multiple times were unduplicated by fiscal year. A list of additional reasons can be found in the Glossary of Terms.

Source: New York City Department of Homeless Services, unpublished data tabulated by the Institute for Children, Poverty, and Homelessness, FY 2015.

Geographic Differences in Reason for Shelter Application and Entry

In all but four of the 59 New York City community districts, eviction was the leading reason families listed for applying to shelter.
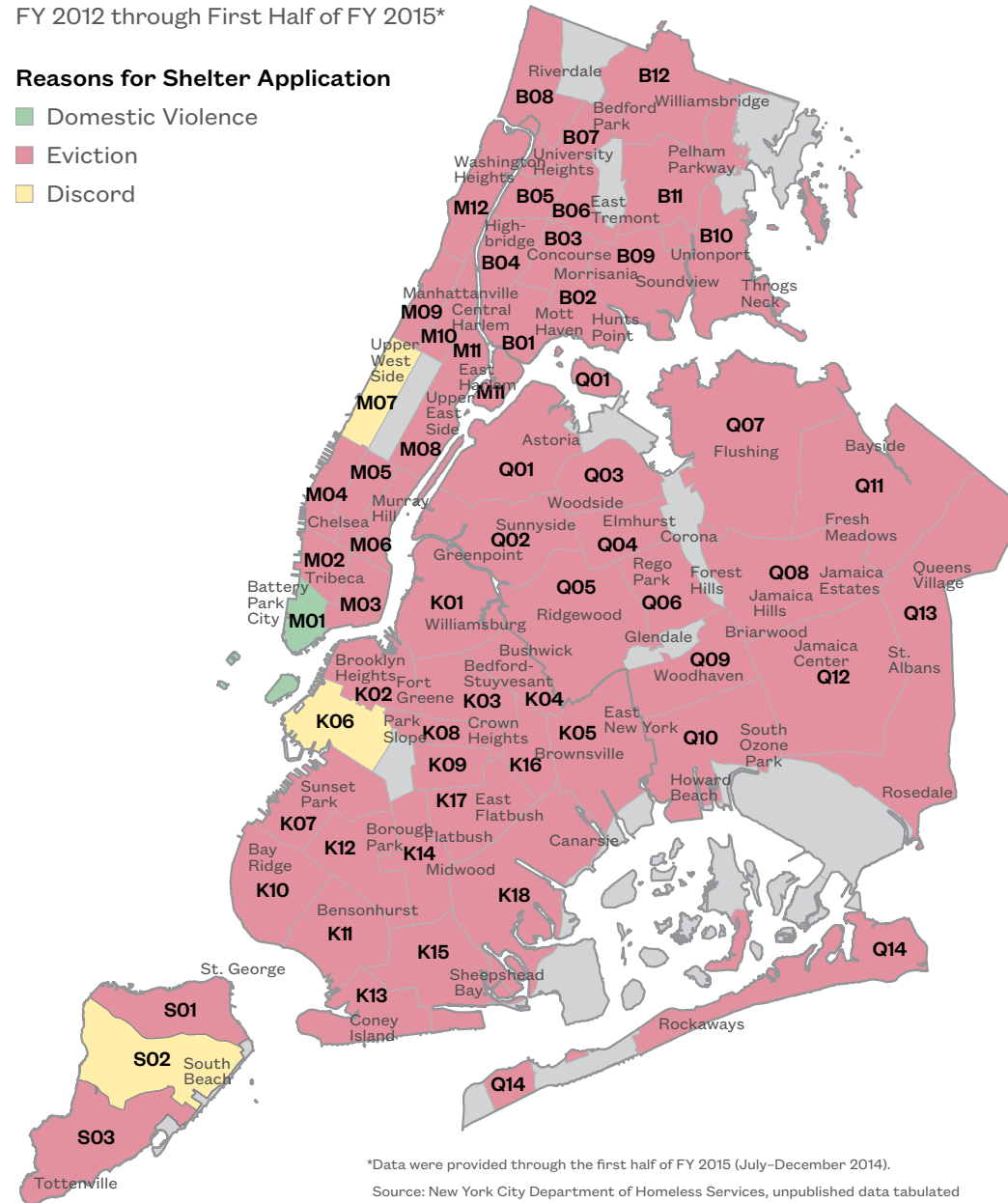
While New York City homeless prevention policy focuses on eviction, this issue may be only a symptom of the underlying problem. The factors driving homelessness are more complex.

Most Common Reason for Families with Children to Apply for Shelter, by Community District

FY 2012 through First Half of FY 2015*

Reasons for Shelter Application

- Domestic Violence
- Eviction
- Discord

*Data were provided through the first half of FY 2015 (July–December 2014).

Source: New York City Department of Homeless Services, unpublished data tabulated by the Institute for Children, Poverty, and Homelessness, FY 2012–FY 2015.

The most frequent reason that families were found eligible to enter shelter by community district was split fairly evenly between eviction (30 community districts) and domestic violence (27 community districts).
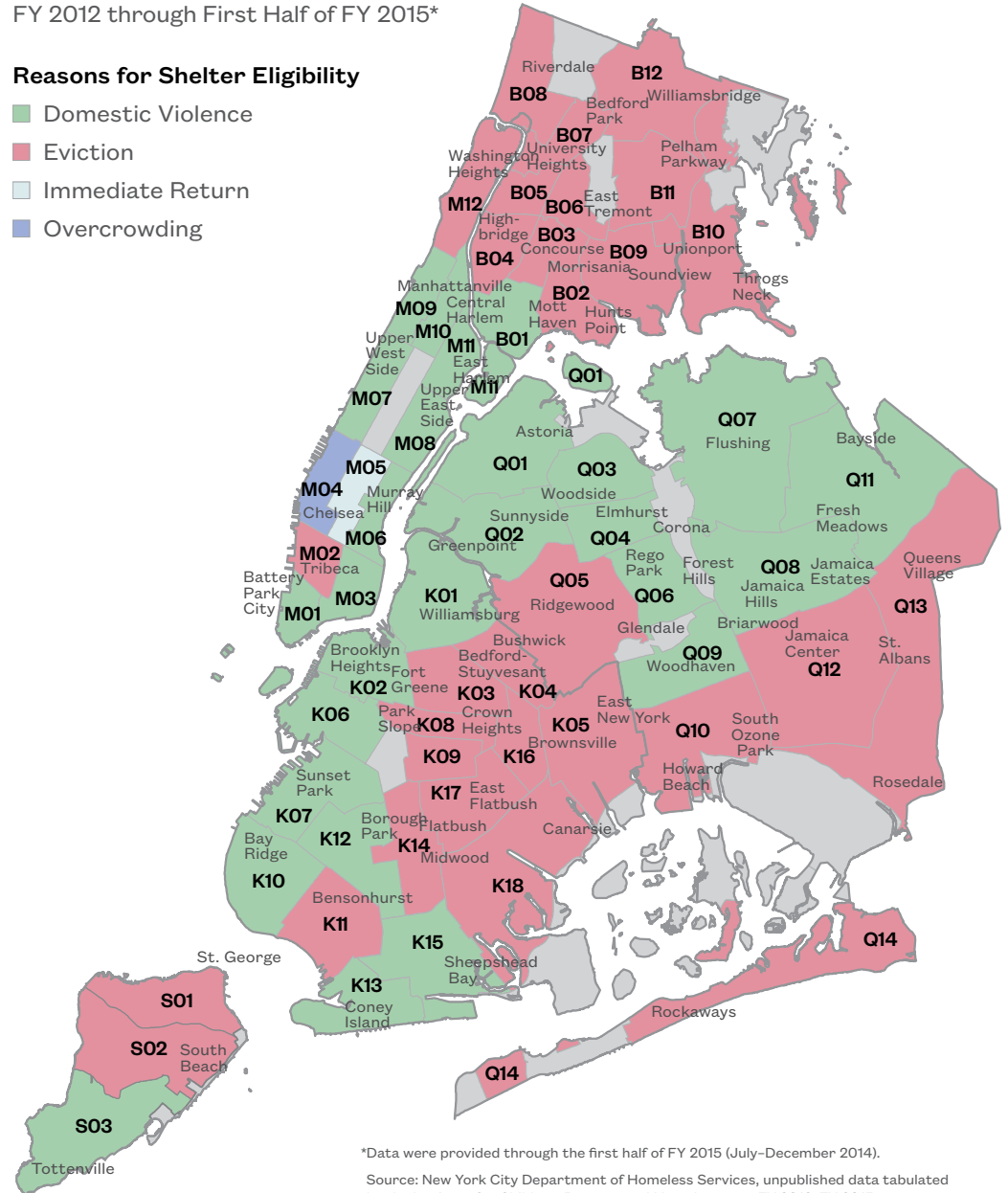
Policies focused solely on housing are clearly limited. At the community level, domestic violence plays an equally important role as eviction in shelter entry.

Most Common Reason Families with Children Were Found Eligible, by Community District

FY 2012 through First Half of FY 2015*

Reasons for Shelter Eligibility

- Domestic Violence
- Eviction
- Immediate Return
- Overcrowding

*Data were provided through the first half of FY 2015 (July–December 2014).

Source: New York City Department of Homeless Services, unpublished data tabulated by the Institute for Children, Poverty, and Homelessness, FY 2012–FY 2015.

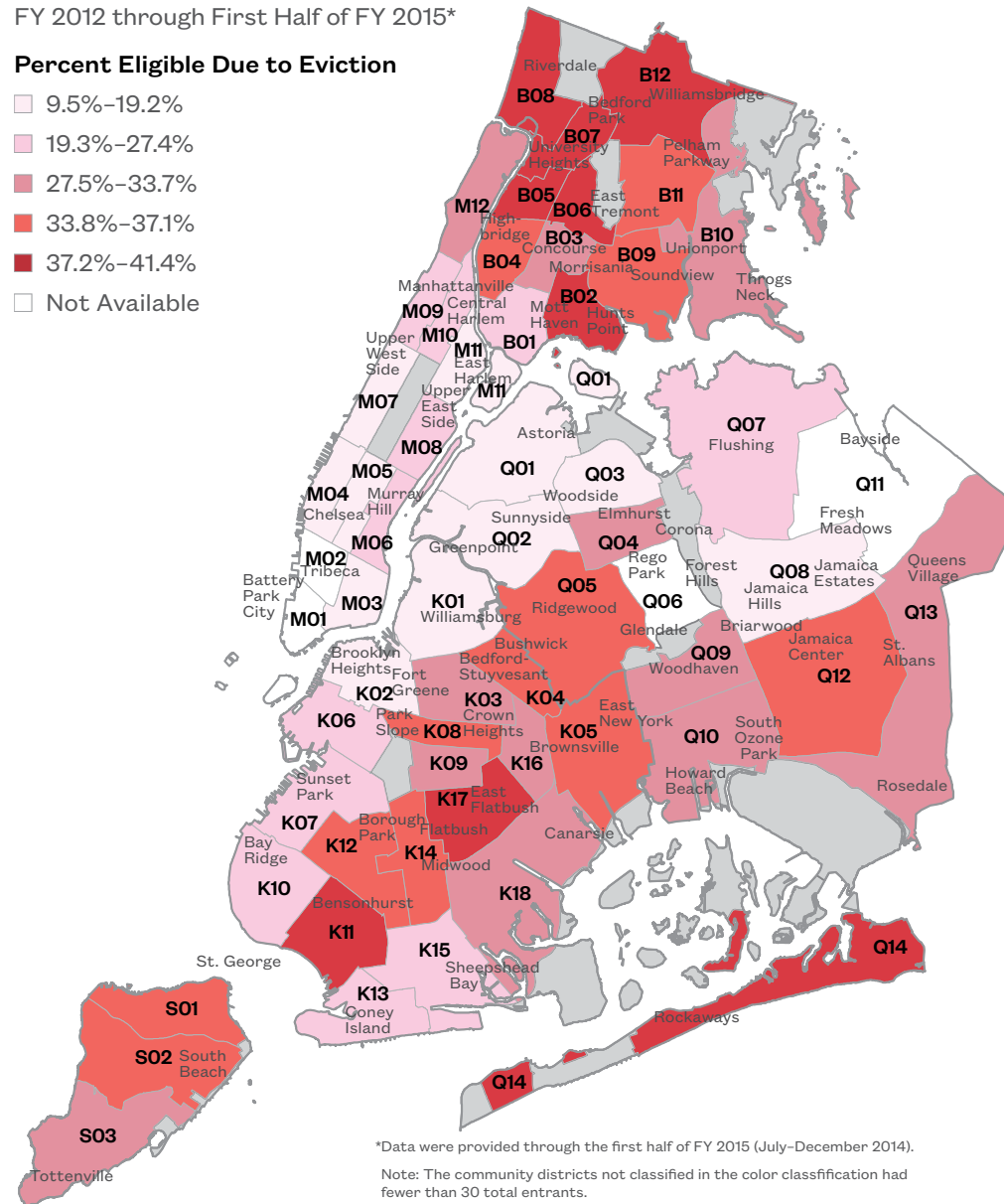# Reason for Shelter Eligibility by Community Is Not the Same

Eviction accounted for 27% of all families found eligible for shelter citywide, but its significance varied greatly by community district. At the low end, only 9.5% of families entered shelter due to eviction in Midtown in Manhattan (M05). At the high end, 41.4% of families entered shelter due to eviction in the Bedford Park area of the Bronx (B07).

Eviction as a Reason for Shelter Eligibility, by Community District

Percent of Families with Children Eligible for Shelter Due to Eviction FY 2012 through First Half of FY 2015*

Percent Eligible Due to Eviction

- 9.5%–19.2%
- 19.3%–27.4%
- 27.5%–33.7%
- 33.8%–37.1%
- 37.2%–41.4%
- Not Available

*Data were provided through the first half of FY 2015 (July–December 2014).

Note: The community districts not classified in the color classification had fewer than 30 total entrants.

Source: New York City Department of Homeless Services, unpublished data tabulated by the Institute for Children, Poverty, and Homelessness, FY 2012–FY 2015.

While domestic violence was the reason that 28% of all families with children were found eligible for shelter by community district, the proportion of families varied ranging from 20.9% in the Riverdale area of the Bronx (B08) to 46% in the Flushing neighborhood of Queens (Q07).
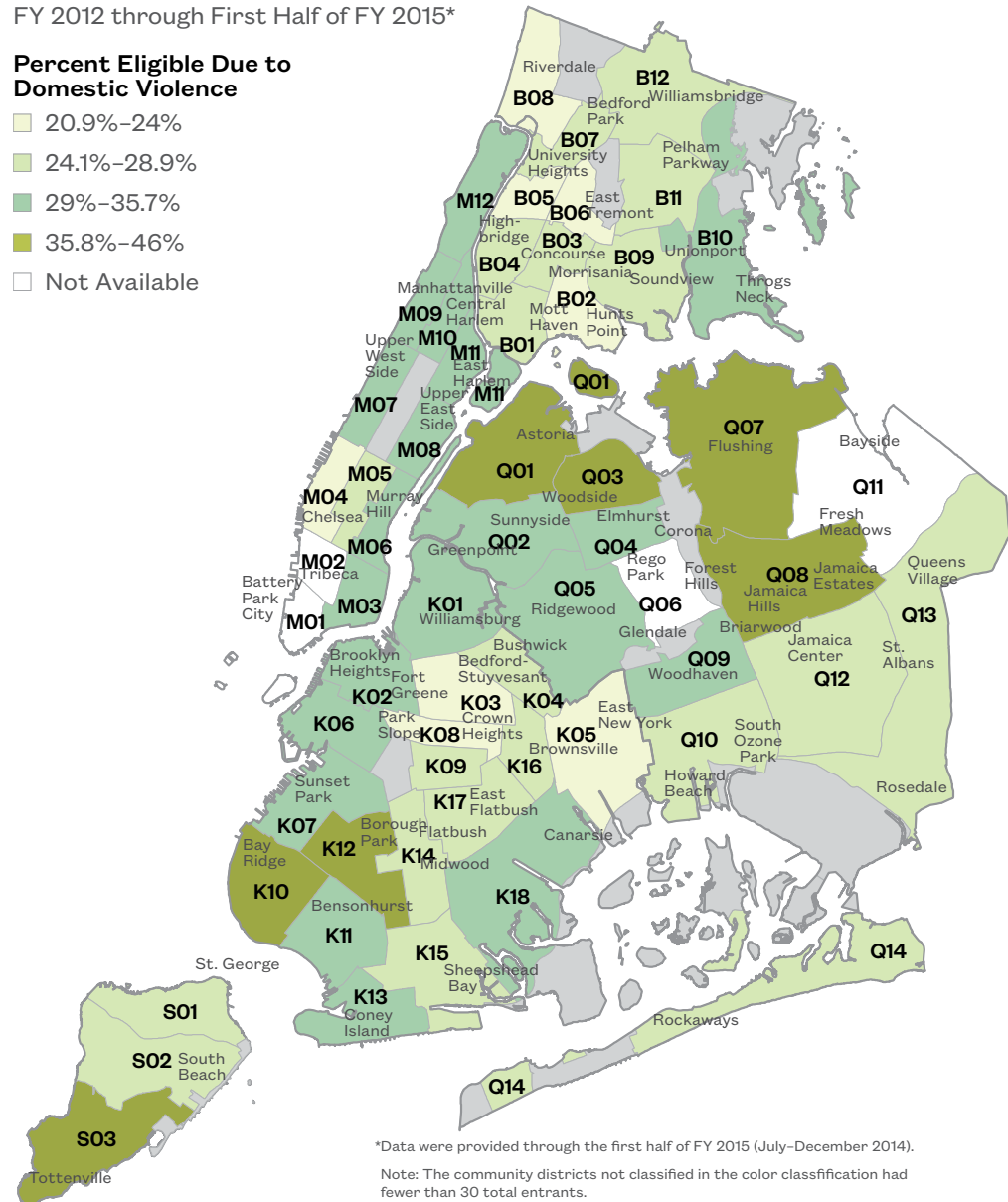
The top three citywide reasons families were found eligible to enter shelter varied greatly by community district. Understanding the local factors driving family homelessness is key to reducing shelter entry.

Domestic Violence as a Reason for Shelter Eligibility, by Community District

Percent of Families with Children Eligible for Shelter Due to Domestic Violence FY 2012 through First Half of FY 2015*

Percent Eligible Due to Domestic Violence

- 20.9%–24%
- 24.1%–28.9%
- 29%–35.7%
- 35.8%–46%
- Not Available

*Data were provided through the first half of FY 2015 (July–December 2014).

Note: The community districts not classified in the color classification had fewer than 30 total entrants.

Source: New York City Department of Homeless Services, unpublished data tabulated by the Institute for Children, Poverty, and Homelessness, FY 2012–FY 2015.

Citywide, overcrowding accounted for 19% of families with children who were found eligible to enter shelter. Overcrowding is defined as more than one occupant per room; however, in many cases much more severe overcrowding takes place.

By community district, the proportion of families entering shelter due to overcrowding ranged from 5.1% in **Borough Park**, Brooklyn (K12), to 27.3% on the **Upper East Side** of Manhattan (M08).
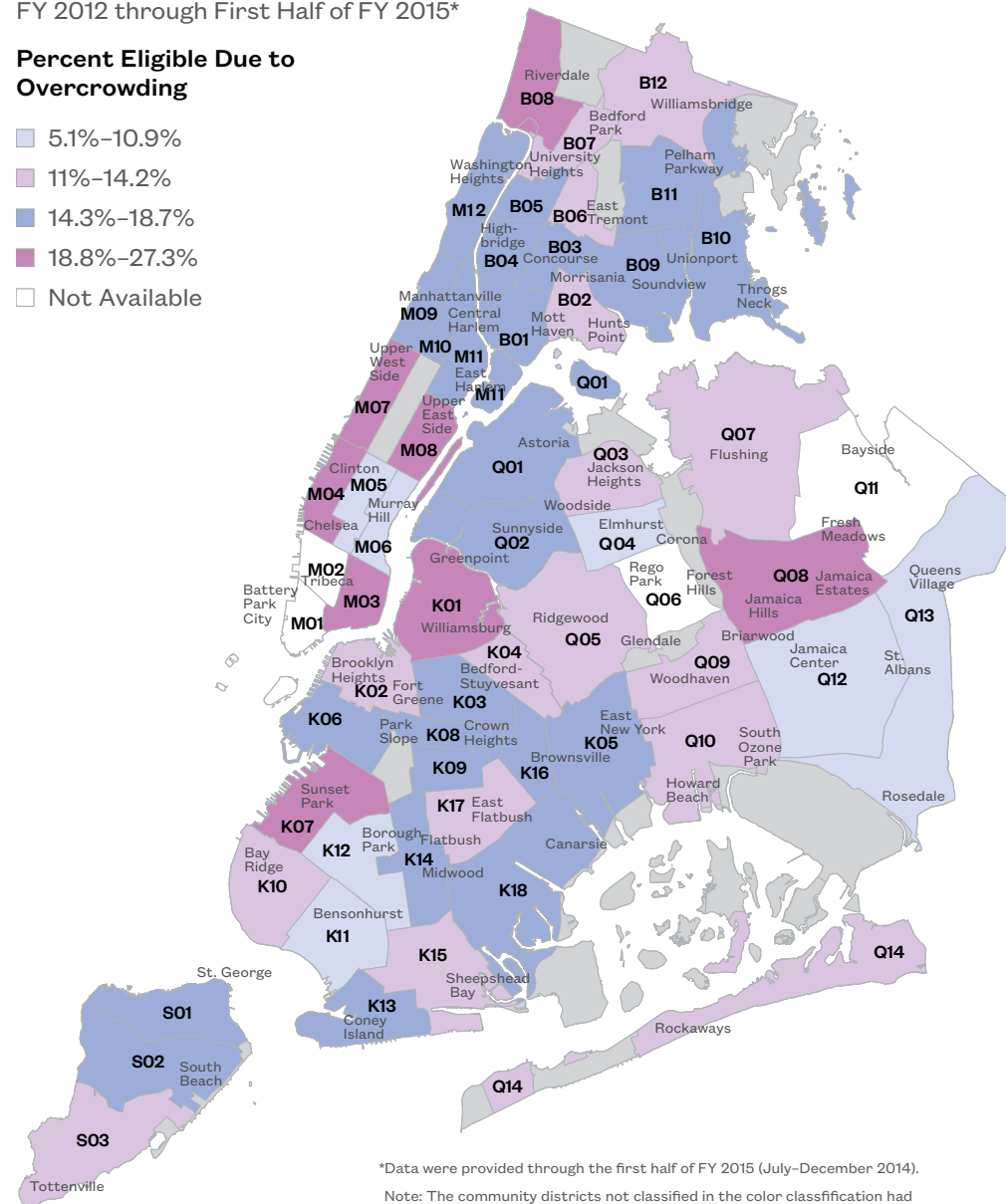
The adverse effects of overcrowding can be mitigated with public supports to address unemployment, hunger, and poor living conditions.

Overcrowding as a Reason for Shelter Eligibility, by Community District

Percent of Families with Children Eligible for Shelter Due to Overcrowding
FY 2012 through First Half of FY 2015*

Percent Eligible Due to Overcrowding

- 5.1%–10.9%
- 11%–14.2%
- 14.3%–18.7%
- 18.8%–27.3%
- Not Available

*Data were provided through the first half of FY 2015 (July–December 2014).

Note: The community districts not classified in the color classification had fewer than 30 total entrants.

Source: New York City Department of Homeless Services, unpublished data tabulated by the Institute for Children, Poverty, and Homelessness, FY 2012–FY 2015.