

# Homelessness and COVID-19 in the US: Converging Crises, a Fragmented Response, and an Uncertain Future

September 25, 2020

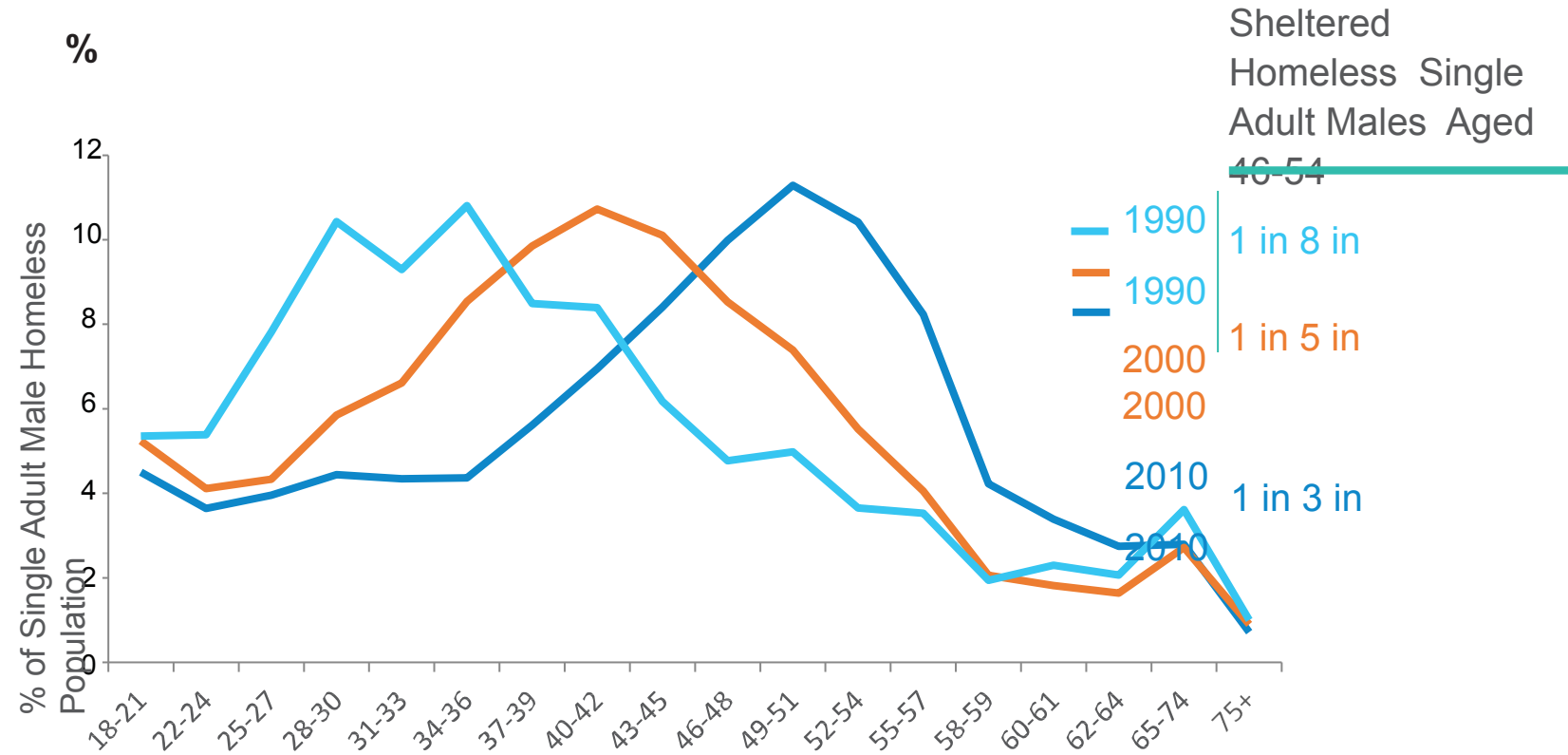
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# Critical Context

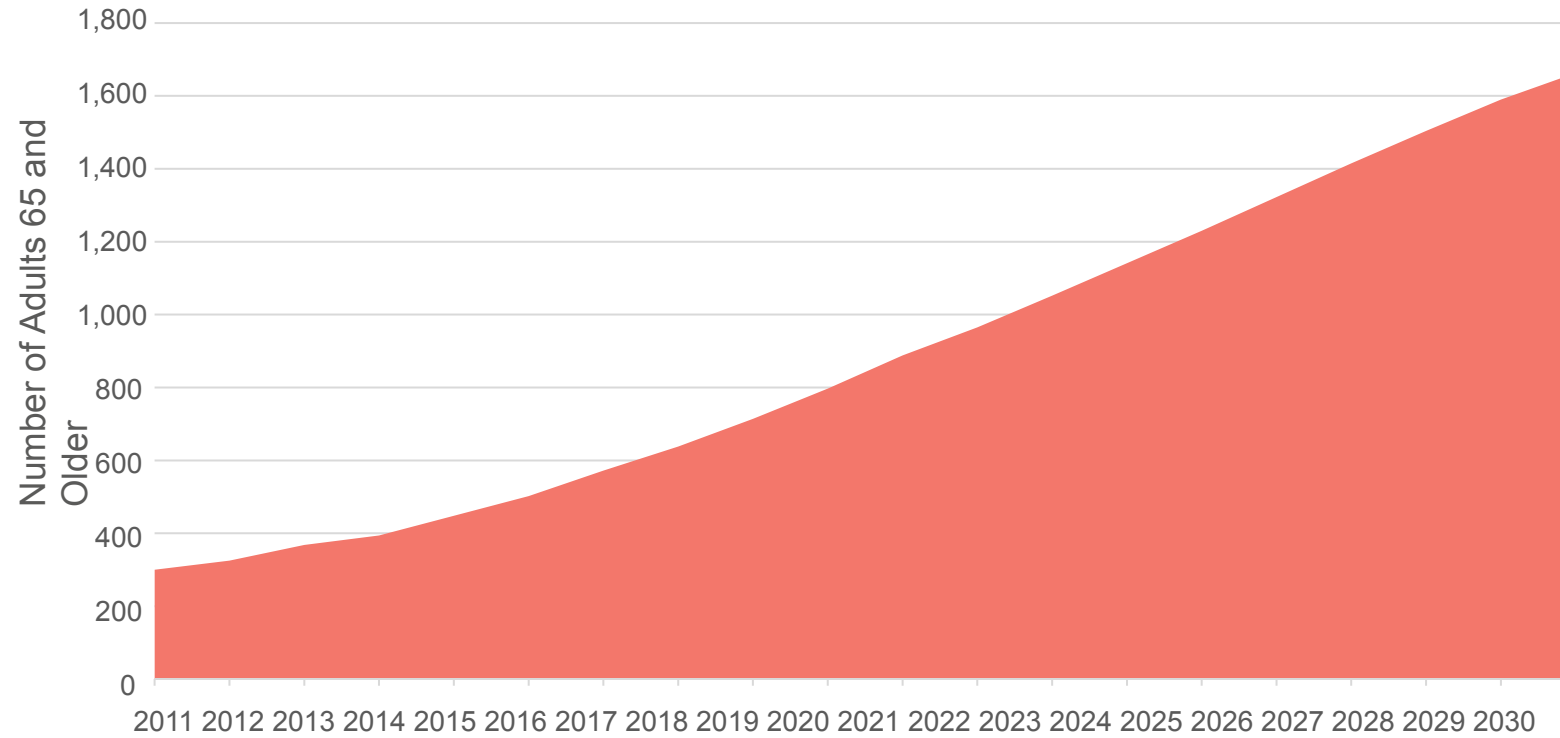
- Accelerated Aging of Adult Homeless Population
- High and Rising Rates of Unsheltered Homelessness on West Coast
- Large Population (~40-60%) with COVID-Comorbid Conditions – “High Risk”

## Homelessness, A Birth Cohort Phenomenon

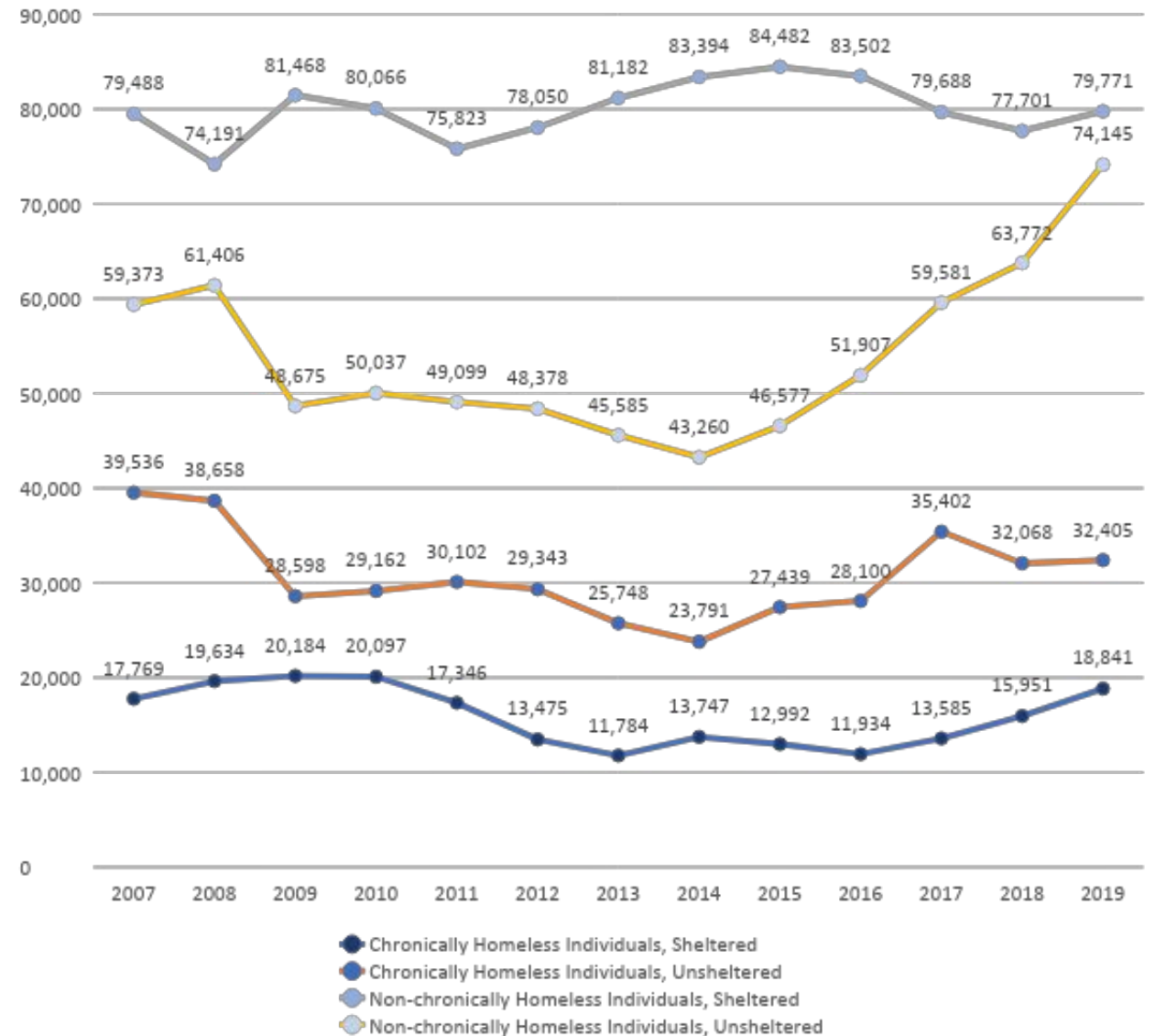
Single Adult Male Shelter Users, United States



## Projecting the 65+ Homeless Adult Population: Boston, MA



Adult  
Homelessness:  
Note 71%  
Increase in  
Unsheltered  
Nonchronic,  
2014-2019  
(in yellow)



# In March, Projected Emergency Accommodation Needs

- Density Reduction in Existing Shelter Inventory to Accommodate Recommended Social Distancing (100 sq feet per person)
  - Current supply of 200,000 with 50% Density Reduction = 100,000 bed loss
- Unsheltered Population of 211,000, possibly 300,000 (40% undercount)
  - + 300,000 beds to shelter everyone
  - “High risk” only, +180,000 beds
- Net Accommodation Need: 280,000 – 400,000
- Cost: \$11.5 Billion per year

# Local Homelessness Assistance Response, NAEH Survey Results, August, 2020

- 85% placed people in hotels and motels, both COVID+ and comorbid at-risk
- 30% closed shelters
- 38% opened shelters
- 31% secured new permanent housing units
- 40% are exiting hotel residents to housing, 28% to homelessness, 30% unknown.
- Many communities looking to acquire hotels, convert to housing or as shelter.

# Major Challenges

- Lack of coordinated testing strategy
- Lack of coordination with local health departments
- Lack of PPE for staff and clients
- Shortages of direct care staff in shelters
- Reported increases in unsheltered homelessness in some places
- State and local government revenue shortfalls



# Federal Response

- Federal Emergency Management Agency – Paying for hotels, 75%, for 90 days per placement
- CARES Act, Emergency Solutions Grants (ESG-CV), \$4 Billion for Prevention, Rapid Rehousing, Rent Assistance
- Funds can be spent through 9/22
- NAEH has warned against using ESG for prevention
- CDC has extended national moratorium on evictions, some exceptions
- Many states have barred utility companies from shutting off services; rates of nonpayment have doubled.

# Black Lives Matter Movement against System Racism

- Growing recognition of racial disproportionality in homelessness
- COVID and Recession Impacts Hitting Black and Latinx Communities Hardest
- Housing crowding a major driver of contagion
- Dependence on direct service employment; Public transit
- High comorbidity rates, due to poor health and access to health care, both associated with structural poverty and systemic racism
- Street protests routine, some calling out the crisis of “unhoused” (interesting rejection of “homeless” label)

# Will COVID Mark a Turning point?

- Open discussion of the inappropriateness of congregate shelter
- Are hotels with 90 day stays and coordinated transition to housing pointing to a new model?
- Heightened local awareness of aging of homeless population and vulnerability of homeless elderly
- Growing support for minimum income programs?
- “Social determinants of health” providers and payers targeting “unhoused” and increased coordination of housing and health
- Or will deficits and recession lead to contraction and reversal?

