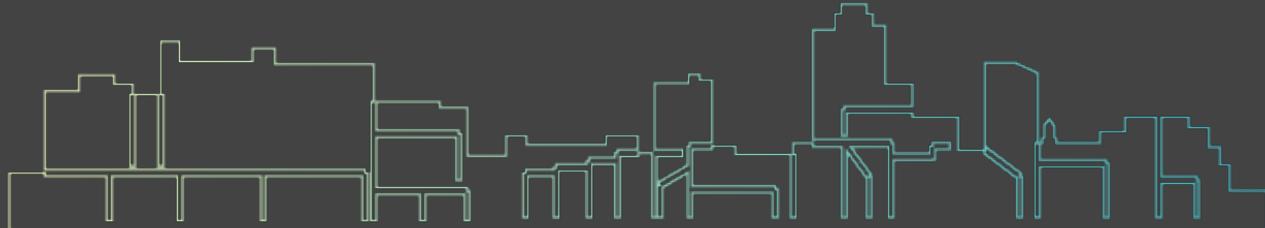


2024

Ralph W. Voorhees Center for Civic Engagement  
Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy  
Rutgers University

# Homelessness in New Brunswick and Programs to Address it



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## Executive Summary

This project emerged as a Rutgers Equity Alliance for Community Health (REACH) funded partnership between the research team and the Unity Square Community Center, Catholic Charities, Diocese of Metuchen. We collectively sought to understand how homelessness and housing precarity had changed in New Brunswick since before the pandemic, to map efforts to address needs, and to identify challenges. We conducted nineteen 45-minute interviews with non-profit and voluntary organizations, food pantries, local government, and Rutgers Behavioral Health staff and reviewed existing literature, news articles, and planning documents. We gathered information about affordable rental housing from the New Jersey State of Affordable Rental Housing (NJSOARH) project. NJSOARH, funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, is a project of the Ralph W. Voorhees Center for Civic Engagement, Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Policy, Rutgers University.

Interviewees shared that:

- the **number and variety of people who are unhoused and living in precarious conditions has increased** since before the pandemic. This includes long term residents, recent arrivals, families, migrants, and seniors, some of whom struggle with mental and physical health challenges and substance use.
- there is an **inadequate supply of good quality emergency, temporary, and permanent affordable housing**, including units with social services. Active substance users have even fewer options as many programs do not allow active use.
- **housing in the New Brunswick area is expensive** and a lack of consistent or sufficiently high income makes finding and keeping affordable housing challenging.
- **stronger networks and information sharing amongst** government, voluntary, mutual aid, nonprofit, and community organizations would be useful. Many of these actors have expanded services and services often change.
- **delivering housing, social services, and healthcare in ways that respect people's dignity and individual needs** is critical.
- **accessing services is challenging.** It may require Internet access, a charged phone, long wait or phone times, callbacks, virtual meetings, and scheduled appointments, which are sometimes far away. Many people lack phones, the ability to charge them, and transportation. Ensuring access means addressing these issues.
- many people who are unhoused would benefit from **having a case manager**.
- **existing programs may not match current needs.** Some people may not qualify and others have run out service clocks.
- there are **a lack of safe spaces** to go during the day and at night.

Interviewees shared a wealth of ideas for the future to address the issues they see today. These are outlined in the report's conclusion.

# Table of Contents

<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Homelessness and Housing .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Insecurity in New Brunswick .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Social Services Infrastructure.....</b>	<b>7</b>
Getting and retaining identification .....	8
Applying for services and attending meetings .....	9
Emergency services.....	11
<b>Housing .....</b>	<b>14</b>
Federally assisted housing .....	15
Housing with services .....	18
Nonprofit and voluntary organizations .....	19
<b>Ideas for the Future.....</b>	<b>21</b>
Services, healthcare, and case management.....	21
Housing .....	22
<b>Glossary .....</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>Works Cited.....</b>	<b>25</b>

## Introduction

Community organizations have reported that homelessness and housing precarity have increased in New Brunswick since before the pandemic. In a city of about 55,000 people, where 82% of the city's housing units are renter occupied, nearly a third (32%) of residents live in poverty (ACS 2018-2022).<sup>1</sup> To make shelter affordable, some pay a large share of income for rent, share housing, or live in poorer quality conditions. Others live unhoused or in temporary housing.

Community organizations attribute increases in homelessness to a lack of affordable housing, increased housing costs, precarious working conditions, and physical and mental health conditions. Reflecting the extent of the problem, they report increased requests for food, utilities, transportation, social services, healthcare, and housing (Interviews, 2023-2024).

Partnering with the Unity Square Community Center, we wanted to understand how homelessness and housing precarity had changed since before the pandemic, map efforts to address unmet needs, and identify remaining challenges.

To do this, we conducted nineteen 45-minute interviews with staff and volunteers at non-profit and voluntary organizations, food pantries, local government, and Rutgers Behavioral Health. We also gathered information about the city's stock of affordable rental housing from the New Jersey State of Affordable Rental Housing (NJSOARH) project, funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and housed at the Rutgers Ralph W. Voorhees Center for Civic Engagement.

The focus of this report is to document the challenges emergency service organizations and their clients experience as they attempt to access housing and related services, map the existing housing and service infrastructure, and identify areas of unmet need.

The report begins with a discussion about housing insecurity in New Brunswick. Next, it outlines the public private service infrastructure to address it. A description of the existing stock of affordable rental housing follows. The report concludes with a set of ideas for the future.

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<sup>1</sup> This includes some undergraduate and graduate students with low incomes who reside off campus.

## Homelessness and Housing Insecurity in New Brunswick

Interviewees report that housing insecurity has grown worse and become more complicated in New Brunswick since before the pandemic started. They report that a greater number of people are unhoused or living in precarious conditions. Mental and physical health challenges, along with active substance use, have become more prevalent. And people who had previously not struggled as much to afford housing including seniors, college students, and people who work full time, have been reaching out for assistance. In this context, interviewees stressed the critical need for quality emergency housing, temporary shelters, and permanent affordable housing.

Seeking to explain increasing housing precarity, interviewees cited a set of challenges that predated the pandemic and have since been amplified. First, low and inconsistent wages make finding and keeping housing challenging. Second, and especially in the early part of the pandemic, some people amassed rental debt in the face of lost wages. Third, some people remain housed by spending a large share of their income for housing. Fourth, some share an apartment or room or rent a basement or hallway to afford housing. As an interviewee explained:

*“There’s a lot of people who rent to other people, who sublet because the cost of renting property is super expensive, and it’s hard to find a home that is available that is in good condition.”*

More recently, rising rents and fees and declining rental vacancy has made finding safe affordable housing ever more difficult, even for those with housing vouchers. And limited budgets further tightened as COVID-era social service benefits ended.

New Brunswick’s community organizations hear about the related stresses on household budgets as people visit food pantries to access food, toiletries, and household products. An interviewee explained, “They are coming to the pantry to stretch meals to make sure they have housing in place.” Unity Square alone provided food for 389 households of nearly 1,500 people in November and 562 households in December, 2023 (Unity Square, 2024).

Even as people share housing and offset household budget expenses by visiting food pantries, it’s not enough. Some people have become unhoused or live in temporary housing. The annual Point in Time (PIT) count of sheltered and unsheltered homeless people shows that 163 people were homeless in New Brunswick in 2022 (Monarch, 2023). This is likely an undercount as it only includes people who were located on the night of the PIT count. It also employs a narrow definition of homelessness that does not count people who share housing or double up, common practices.

Interviewees stressed that the number of unhoused people in New Brunswick has grown. People live outdoors along the river and under bridges as well as in parks,

cemeteries, and well-lit places with security cameras where people, especially women, may feel more secure. People who are homeless and near homeless face a myriad of challenges accessing and retaining temporary and permanent housing, meeting everyday needs, and finding safe spaces during the day and at night.

Interviewees described an increase in the number of people with mental and physical illness and conveyed how these factors can contribute to becoming and remaining homeless. One interviewee explained that there is "so much depression and anxiety."

Interviewees stressed that each moment on the street and each challenge makes a successful recovery more difficult.

Additionally, people who are unhoused face challenges accessing preventative healthcare like wellness checks, vaccines, and over the counter drugs. Treating chronic conditions such as those that require dialysis or regular cancer treatments becomes exponentially more difficult. Living outdoors makes everyday life considerably more challenging. For example, one interviewee pointed to the challenges of using an electric wheelchair without a regular power source.

Interviewees cited health issues and addiction as some of the most challenging aspects of supporting people who are unhoused today. They described the cases of the people they have worked with over the last few years as "more intense." They attribute this in part to an increased use of fentanyl, ketamine, and heroin, especially when that use is combined with mental illness. Overdoses have become more common, and there are not enough treatment

facilities or beds in existing facilities. And when they are able to get people into treatment facilities, people may return to the street shortly thereafter. Interviewees stressed the importance of housing that would enable people to move beyond addiction.

We turn next to a discussion of the social services system that seeks to help people who experience homelessness and housing insecurity.



## Social Services Infrastructure

*"One of the things we noticed is that the systems and resources available, there's no listing available. It's more word of mouth."*

*"Many unhoused don't like how they are treated for getting help. The delivery and way we foster this can be improved to make our services go that much further."*

The social services infrastructure for people who are homeless includes the Middlesex County Board of Social Services (MCBSS, locals pronounce this as MCBOSS). A statewide 211 referral system links people to governmental and non-governmental services, especially outside of MCBSS operating hours. And Coming Home Middlesex, a non-profit organization, implements the Continuum of Care (CoC). In addition to these governmental efforts, a large variety of nonprofit and voluntary organizations provides services and or come in contact with people who are homeless or at risk of it.

To strengthen the linkages between providers, the City of New Brunswick's Division of Human Services convenes a Homelessness Round Table that draws the County Office of Emergency Management, county and municipal social services, police, the New Brunswick City School District, hospitals, and human service providers together to work through the challenges that people who are homeless face. To further improve service access, the City organizes Social Service Open Houses to link service organizations and make it easier for people to access services in one place.

Organizations have developed formal and informal relationships to facilitate access to care. Organizations with full time staff such as those at Rutgers Behavioral Health have well-developed networks and processes that make navigating complicated public and private service systems possible. Other nonprofits, such as Elijah's Promise, a local nonprofit organization dedicated to food security, meets regularly with public and private service providers to ensure that people flow through the system to access services.

Religious institutions and nonprofit and voluntary organizations are often a first stop for people looking for assistance. These neighborhood organizations are often easily accessible from people's homes. People may reach out for one type of assistance like food and then share that they need other kinds of services like housing. These groups may be uncertain how social service and housing systems work, and they do not necessarily have the regular relationships that make it possible to weave people into systems of care. Some have developed relationships with other organizations and provide referrals. Many refer people to 211.

The 211 phone and Internet referral system aggregates and updates information about social services, health, and housing resources and matches people to existing services. Recently, the Middlesex County CoC added 211 representatives who sit at select community locations, including at Unity Square Community Center in New Brunswick, providing an in-person referral service

(O'Donnell a, 2023). Individuals looking for information, and those who might support them, report that using 211 by phone can be challenging. Some of the frustration has to do with the lack of sufficient resources to address needs which 211 does not control. For example, 211 cannot produce more temporary or permanent housing, social services, or healthcare.

Other 211-related challenges are related to the disconnects between a phone and Internet referral system and the realities of the people they seek to serve. To provide assistance, 211 conducts a comprehensive intake and referral process. Callers may need to stay on the phone for a period of time, provide identification and other information, and be available for callbacks. Interviewees explain that people who are unhoused may not have cell phones, often lack paperwork including identification, may be unable to stay on the phone for long periods of time or receive call backs, and may not be able to set up or get to virtual or physical appointments. One interviewee tried to explain the challenges:

*"I think because of the population that is calling them, there's a disconnect there. Not everyone has a phone. It's not always charged."*

A few service providers mentioned that 211 referred people to them for services that they do not provide. Organizations tried to help people, but it left organizations addressing emergency situations that were beyond their organizational mission. The organizations tried to update their records in the 211 system but were unsuccessful.

Finally, interviewees shared that some people avoid calling 211 altogether. Some fear that their children will be removed if they let someone know they need help. Others expect they will not qualify for assistance because they exceeded their service clock or because of a mismatch between their needs and available services.

The effect is that small organizations, where many people turn for help, find themselves frustrated and without a clear path forward.

## Getting and retaining identification

Interviewees stressed that a lack of identification is one of the biggest barriers to accessing services and housing. Identification is easily lost or stolen. And getting a new Social Security card is a time intensive process. And importantly, the federal government limits people to ten Social Security cards during their lifetime and three in one year. Though the federal agency might allow a new card in an exceptional circumstance, getting that approved may not be seamless, quick, or assured (SSA, 2023).

Getting documents is only one part of the challenge. Interviewees emphasized that people need a safe place to store them. The Middlesex County Resource Center provides safe storage along with a mailing address and phones. They also help people get identification (Middlesex County Resource Center, online). And the New Brunswick library assists people who need a New Brunswick municipal identification card. Even with these services, people report that getting and retaining identification is an ongoing significant challenge. If people carry

these items with them, they can easily become damaged, lost, or stolen.

## Applying for services and attending meetings

*"If you want to find information, you end up hearing: look at our website."*

*"The paperwork alone is a difficult process when you are homeless."*

Interviewees stressed how important it is that people apply for services and attend in-person meetings with providers. But they also explained just how hard that is for people who are unhoused or precariously housed and for those with health and substance abuse issues. People struggle to keep track of and get to virtual and physical appointments. And though the Internet has made information accessible, trying to locate or apply for programs online or attend remote meetings is challenging.

Getting and keeping a charged phone and using online platforms for remote access can be difficult. And even with a phone or computer, it can be difficult to complete online applications and attend remote meetings. This is especially true for those who are older, lack experience with online processes, or find it difficult to see or use platforms on their phones, or do not speak or read English fluently. Additionally, people may be unable to take a photo of required identification (if they have it) to email or post into social service systems.

Finally, as most people are aware, calling large systems to access assistance often means waiting on hold for long periods of

time. But someone who is unhoused lacks a place to make that call, especially if they need to retain the charge on their phone to complete a call with a prolonged wait time.

Having a working phone is not only critical for reaching out to access services. Without one, service providers have an especially hard time reaching people. A few interviewees mentioned that they ask people to add case managers as contacts when they apply for services and housing waitlists. Case managers might have a better chance at locating them if a service appointment is scheduled or housing unit becomes available. To underscore the importance of this, after years on the wait list, people can lose their housing opportunity if service providers are unable to reach them. Critically, many people do not have case managers.

The need for comprehensive case management came up repeatedly in interviews. Many people mentioned the effectiveness of Rutgers Behavioral Health Services programs. Many of these programs receive government funding that supports full time staff, including case management teams, and strong formal networks to public and private nonprofit and voluntary programs and services.

## Rutgers Behavioral Health Programs

- **PATH (Projects for Assistance in Transition from Homelessness)**, funded by the NJ Division of Mental Health and Addiction Services, provides services and case management for people with mental health needs who are homeless or at risk of it. A few interviewees echoed the sentiment that: "PATH is one of our best partners."
- **MRAP (Maternal Wraparound Program)** provides case management assistance and services for women who are pregnant or postpartum with substance abuse disorders.
- **Rutgers WECARE** is a Community Mental Health Center funded by a federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration grant. It provides services for people in Middlesex County struggling with severe mental illness and substance abuse disorders
- **RHOME** serves people who are homeless or live in precarious housing and have substance abuse and mental health issues. It is funded by a federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration grant.
- **LEAD (Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion)** is a new program funded through the New Jersey Office of the Attorney General. It provides case management and mental health and substance abuse services for people in crisis who are referred by the police or community organizations (Rutgers University Behavioral Health Care, 2023)
- The Rutgers **Community Health Initiative (CHI)** operates student run outreach programs. Interviewees mentioned **HIPHOP (Rutgers Homeless and Indigent Population Health Outreach Program)** in particular (Rutgers a 2023).

## Other Service Organizations

- The **New Jersey Harm Reduction Coalition (NJHRC)** had been doing outreach in New Brunswick on Wednesdays and is expanding that work to five days. They provide clothing, snacks, NARCAN® (naloxone nasal spray to treat opiate overdoses) and a clean needle box to improve safety and refer people to treatment and housing.
- **New Brunswick Tomorrow** sometimes provides hygiene kits.
- **Catholic Charities** offers case management for unhoused individuals, in addition to Ozanam House, as well as those suffering from behavioral health challenges.

## Emergency services

In addition to the suite of programs and services above, people turn to a variety of organizations to access what are often described as emergency services.

### *Meals and groceries*

Meal and grocery programs address food insecurity and reduce strain on household budgets. Many organizations offer meals and groceries and work together within the Feeding New Brunswick Network coalition.

- **REPLENISH**, the county food bank, produces a regularly updated directory that includes many of the food programs available in Middlesex County (REPLENISH, 2024).
- **Elijah's Promise**, historically a major meal provider in the city, has provided a grab-and-go lunch since the pandemic. They bring clothing, hot meals, and hygiene kits to people through street outreach weekly.
- The **United Methodist Church** downtown began providing sit down meal service when the pandemic started. A subsequent partnership with Elijah's Promise provides meals four times a week.
- **Archangel Raphael's Mission** (ARM) operates a handwashing station at the United Methodist Church at dinner.
- **Emmanuel Lutheran and Christ Church** jointly operate a food pantry at the Unity Square Community Center on Remsen Avenue.

- **Sharon Baptist Church** provides groceries, produce, and Thanksgiving meals. Elijah's Promise's food truck distributes meals at Sharon Baptist Church as well.
- **Anshe Emeth Temple** runs a diaper bank.

Despite these and other programs, there is unmet need. Interviewees highlighted the importance of providing good quality meals and groceries with dignity. This means that people are well treated, have access to high-quality food, and select the food they want. Interviewees mentioned that people who have been placed in temporary housing in hotels often lack access to kitchen facilities, food, and other necessities like diapers.

### *Showers, handwashing, clothes, and hair*

Many interviewees pointed out how difficult it is for people who are unhoused to access restrooms, wash their hands, take showers, do laundry, and access clean clothing. Private restrooms, such as those at restaurants, became less accessible when the pandemic started. ARM, a nonprofit, formed in 2014, has run a mobile shower van with towels, soap, hygiene products, and clothes and organizes haircuts (Yi, 2022; ARM, 2023). Currently, ARM, Emanuel Lutheran Church and the United Methodist Church are supporting showers at the Church Garden on some Saturdays.

Christ Church has operated "Laundry Love" at the Handy Street laundromat a few times a

month on set dates at set times since 2019. They offer laundry cards and detergent from a triple-bottom-line company that donates it. Twenty to forty people use the program each month. Bilingual staff from RU Behavioral Health, Rutgers WeCare, and New Brunswick High School provide outreach and communication.

The City also operates a Dignity Center with showers at Memorial Stadium. Interviewees stressed how important the showers are and wished they were located downtown, closer to where people reside. As one interviewee explained, "we have people who are in their 60s who can't walk and they can't trudge up a hill." Interviewees stressed the importance of providing care products such as towels, soap, razors, feminine products, and other personal care items.

#### *Day and nighttime respite and services*

Interviewees stressed the need for day and nighttime respite with services for people who are unhoused. There are a few options in New Brunswick, although interviewees report a critical need for additional safe daytime and nighttime services.

#### Day Center

The Urban Health Collaborative's Day Center serves up to 15 people. Equipped with a bathroom, wireless Internet access, clothing, and hygiene kits, it is open Tuesday to Friday from 10am to 3pm. Rutgers Bonner Community Fellows volunteer at the Center

and the NAACP provides clothing and other items.

#### New Brunswick Public Library

The New Brunswick Public Library also provides a quiet calm place for people during the daytime and outlets to charge phones, laptops, and personal devices. Computers and Internet access enable people to review services on websites and complete applications. But some people who use the library struggle with addiction and others with medical illness, and it is often hard to navigate these systems. Rutgers Social Work interns have worked at the library since 2017, and the School of Public Health placed an intern in the library last year to provide greater assistance. Interns work 120 hours a semester over 4 months. The library is open 700 hours during that time period, so while certainly beneficial, people need to visit the library when the intern is on-site.

#### Code Blue/Red/Orange Center

New Brunswick City government implements the Emergency Code Blue/Red/Orange Warming Center, located on the second floor at the corner of Remsen Avenue and Suydam Street.<sup>2</sup> By state law, Code Blue initiates a warming center when temperatures are 32 degrees or below. And Code Red initiates a cooling center when temperatures climb to 90 degrees or more. The New Brunswick City Council added Code Orange to provide relief from poor air quality in June 2023 ( O'Donnell, 2023 b). The staffed facility, which is open to everyone, does not require identification. It operates from 7pm to 7am

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<sup>2</sup> The Center was previously located at Henry House near the library and served up to 40 people for the night.

during the cold weather events and at other times as needed. The Center sometimes serves people from outside the City as well as residents. Service providers report seeing police from surrounding towns dropping people off during inclement weather. Surrounding towns may not have centers.

The Center, which is part of an emergency infrastructure, is not woven into other systems of care. However, given its co-location with the Unity Square Community Center on the first floor, Catholic Charity staff are often contacted before and after weather events to provide assistance. And people often gather outside the community center before and after the Code Blue Center is open and may seek services. Though separate from the warming Center infrastructure, Unity Square has become a related care provider and links people to services. This suggests an as yet unmet opportunity to more

systematically link services with the Cooling Center.

Finally, some interviewees mentioned that some residents avoid the Center, which may suggest a need for other emergency safe spaces during weather events along with additional services at the Center.



## Housing

Interviewees cited a shortage of emergency, temporary, and permanent housing as a critical issue. Contemporary New Brunswick is a city of renters. It has the second highest municipal rentership rate in the state, 1 percentage point behind Harrison (83%). The share of renter-occupied housing units increased from 74% in 2000 to 82% in 2020. While some units were created by dividing existing homes, others were produced through new construction, including in new luxury developments downtown and near the Rutgers University College Avenue campus. For example, more than 1,400 new units were added in census tract 93, which covers parts of downtown near Route 18, between 2000 and 2020, with 832 of those since 2010. A limited number were produced with subsidies such as the Low Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) and targeted to lower income households including those who need supportive services. Units produced more recently at the New Brunswick Performing Arts Center, for example, include some with LIHTC assistance, which are marketed to lower-income artists (See Table 1).

The total number of renter households has also been growing. It increased by roughly 3,000 between 2000 and 2020 (US Decennial Census, 2000; 2020). New luxury development has drawn higher-income renters downtown for at least the past twenty years. The City is home to immigrant communities adjacent to downtown which

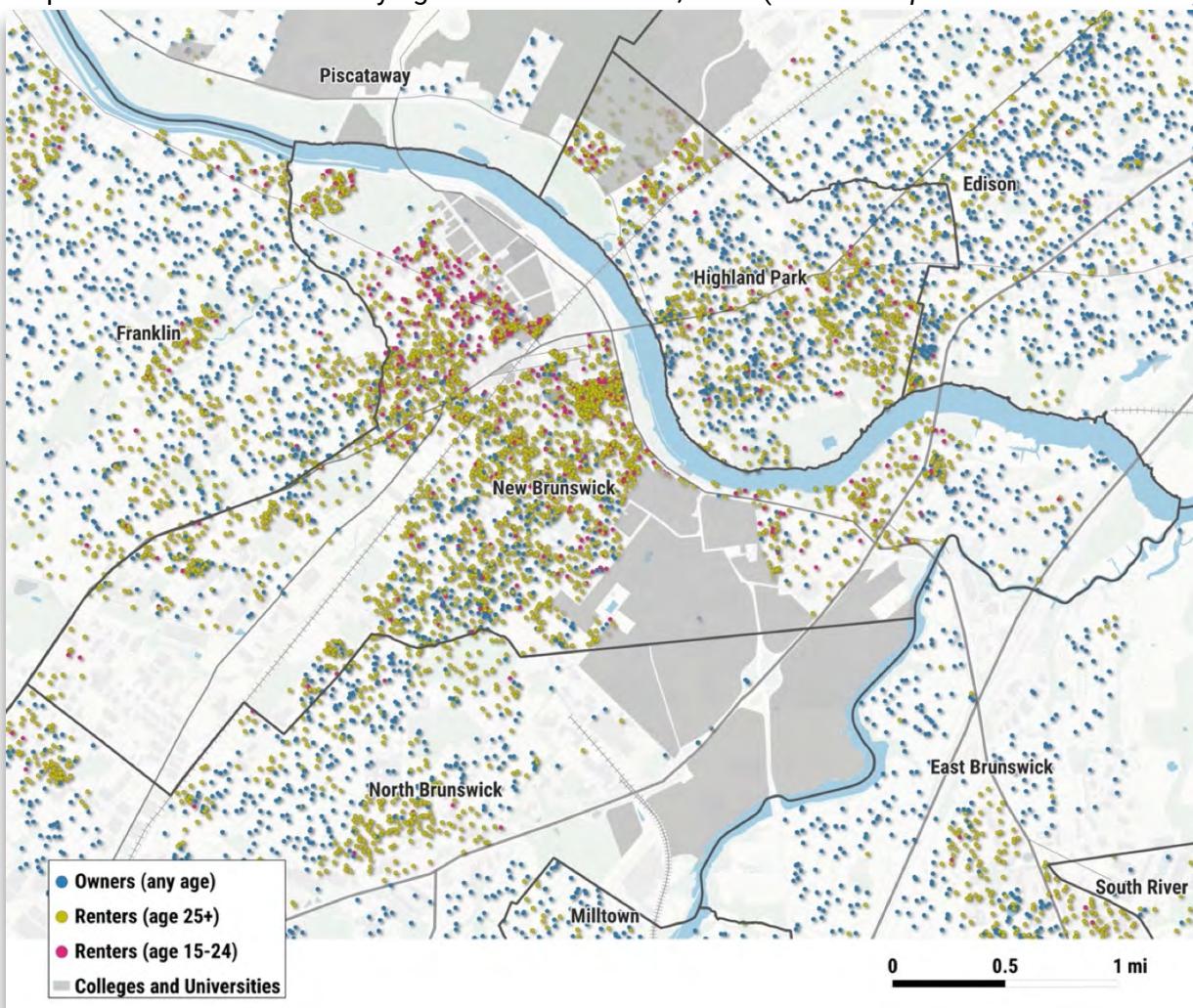
have been growing. Finally, home to the New Brunswick campus of Rutgers University, college and graduate students comprise a sizable number of renters. Twenty eight percent of the City's population is between the ages of 18 and 24 (Census 2020). Nearly 7,000 people, mostly students (6,972 people age 18 to 24) live in university housing. The rest live in private market housing, especially around the College Avenue and Cook Douglass campuses. Roughly 15% of all renter households in the City are headed by someone under 24 (nearly 2,000 households) (2020).

Interviewees stressed that the city lacks sufficient affordable housing. The rental vacancy rate for the census tracts that cover downtown neighborhoods was 3.5% in 2020, well below the rate to declare a housing emergency.<sup>3</sup> And even though the City has a rent control ordinance, which limits annual rent increases in a subset of units, interviewees emphasized that housing is becoming more expensive. Interviewees noted that some landlords began charging for utilities which they had previously included in rental rates (Roberts, 2017). With a tight rental market and rising prices, it is hard to find affordable homes. Even those with federal or state housing vouchers are finding it harder than usual to locate and retain affordable units. And students living off campus have been raising concerns about rent (Dopico, 2019).

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<sup>3</sup> Decennial Census data captured a relatively high vacancy rate of 8.4% in 2020 ( $1,200 \text{ for rent} / (1,200 + 419 \text{ rented not occupied} + 12,610 \text{ renter occupied})$ ). This somewhat high rate is likely the result of Rutgers University pivoting to remote course delivery just as the Census data was captured.

Map 1. Renters and owners by age in New Brunswick, 2020 (each dot represents 5 households)



US Bureau of the Census, 2022

## Federally assisted housing

Some residents live in federally assisted housing that is more affordable. About 10 percent of New Brunswick's rental stock receives assistance from the U.S.

Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) through Public Housing, Section 8 Project Based Rental Assistance, the Low Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC), or Project Based Vouchers (PBV), administered through the (otherwise

predominantly tenant-based) Housing Choice Voucher program (NJSOARH Calculation, 2024). Many of these 1,247 federally assisted units are targeted to seniors, such as John P. Fricano Apartments, Livingston Manor, Providence Square, and St. Mary's Apartments. Two new luxury developments – the Aspire and Premiere Residences at NBPAC - include affordable LIHTC units. The city has 259 units of public housing. Built

between 1947 and 1950, these units are located along Route 27. The New Brunswick Housing Authority recently used the federal RAD (Rental Assistance Demonstration) program to convert the public housing downtown that replaced Memorial Homes into federal Project Based Vouchers. Recently, it appears that the 31-unit Lambert Homes no longer receives Project Based Section 8 assistance, but the project's current status is unclear.

Additionally, more than one thousand federal Housing Choice Vouchers (often colloquially referred to as "Section 8" vouchers, not to be confused with the Section 8 Project Based Rental Assistance mentioned above) are used in New Brunswick. Fifty-five of these are VASH vouchers for veterans and 125 are Project Based Vouchers (these include the Project Based Vouchers just discussed). New Jersey's Section 8 wait list is closed, and when it opens, only a small share of people can access housing. Nationally, fewer than one quarter of households who are eligible

for Section 8 assistance receive it (Wheaton et al, 2023). Interviewees explained that it is often hard for people who lack stable housing to remain on housing wait lists. The wait lists are sometimes updated to remove households that are no longer looking for support. But people who move around frequently, especially those who are precariously housed or unhoused, may not receive important communications regarding availability and may be inadvertently removed.

A variety of programs support other affordable units in New Brunswick, and more are planned (see Table 2). It's unclear how many of these units are targeted to people who were homeless.



Table 1. Housing with project-based federal assistance in New Brunswick, NJ 2024

	Built, Renovated, or Converted	Affordable Housing Target Population	Affordable Units	Subsidy Program(s)
The Aspire 135 Somerset Street	2015 New construction		48 (238 total units)	Low Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) 2015
Fulton Gardens 280 Fulton Street	1947?		51	Section 8 Project Based Rental Assistance
John P. Fricano Apts Frank Schatzman Apts 90 Neilson Street	1963	Seniors, people w/ disabilities	213	Section 8 Project Based Rental Assistance
Livingston Manor 116 Livingston Avenue	1996 Preservation/rehab	55+	50	LIHTC 1995
New Brunswick Apartments 33 Paul Robeson Boulevard	1975?		24 (206 total units)	2016 RAD converted Rent Supp to 24 Section 8 Project Based Rental Assistance units LIHTC 2021
Premiere Residences at NBPAC 7, 9 Livingston Avenue*, **	2019 New construction	Marketed to theater/ arts	42 (206 total units)	LIHTC 2019
Providence Square 217 Somerset Street (Former cigar factory)	1993 New construction/ redevelopment	55+	97 (97 LIHTC)	LIHTC 1993
Providence Square Phase II^ 55 Harvey Street	2010 New construction	62+	53 (27 LIHTC; 26 Public Housing/LIHTC)	LIHTC 2010
Lord Stirling Senior Housing*** 40 Hassart Street (Former school)	2007 Preservation/ Rehab	62+	48 (10 LIHTC; 38 LIHTC/HUD MultiFamily)	HOPE VI Section 202 PRAC LIHTC 2004
New Brunswick Homes*** Hope VI Phase 1 Hope Manor 256, 274 George Street	2002 New construction		68 (68 LIHTC) (15 rehab, 53 new)	LIHTC 2002 RAD 2017 Public Housing conversion to 34 Project Based Voucher units
Riverside Apartments*** Riverside Urban Renewal (Memorial Homes, demoed 2001) 15 John St; 16- 26 Riverside Drive	2004 New construction		76 (76 LIHTC)	LIHTC 2003 RAD 2017 Public Housing conversion to 38 Project Based Voucher units
Schwartz Homes Robeson Village	1947-1950		259	Public Housing
Skyline Tower 60 Paterson Street (Former county building)	1967, converted residential 2003		14 (70 total units)	LIHTC 2003
St. Mary's Apartments 260 Remsen Avenue	Early 1920s?	Senior	133	Section 8 Project Based Rental Assistance

NJ HMFA 2022, USDA 2024, US HUD 2024a (2024b, 2024c, 2024d, 2024e, 2024f)

\*5 units for households making 30% AMI or below; 37 units for 50% AMI or below (Premiere Residences)

\*\* Fannie Mae (2020), \*\*\*NJFuture (n.d.), \*\*\*New Brunswick Housing Authority, (n.d.), ^ Thriven Design n.d., ~ New Brunswick Master Plan

Table 2. Planned affordable housing in New Brunswick, NJ

	Subsidy Program	Total Units	Affordable Units
Hildebrand Commons – replaces Hoffman Pavilion - “Building 5” of Memorial Homes, built in 1961 with 60 units, demolished in 2012 75 Neilson Street	Seeking LIHTC	66	65
11 Spring Street Urban Renewal (Spring/Church)	NA	342	68
Stirlingside II 50 Neilson Street	LIHTC 2020	53	53
45 Remsen Avenue	NA	NA	11
100 Jersey Avenue	NA	NA	66

O'Donnell, 2019; New Brunswick Today; Piazzanj, 2024; Martin, 2005; NJDCA, 2022.

## Housing with services

*“We need emergency housing that we can get people into right away.”*

*“We always tell people to call 211 and get on the waitlist for the shelter so you’re in the system and there’s proof that you’re homeless. But ideally there would be some more opportunity for shelter placement where there’s not a huge waitlist”*  
(Interview, 2024).

Interviewees stressed the need for temporary and permanent supportive housing. With no walk-in emergency shelter and a waiting list for Catholic Charities’ **Ozanam Inn** men’s shelter (which provides meals, a case manager and help finding housing), people have few, if any options, for immediate housing. Though the City has other temporary housing targeted to particular populations, it does not meet the current need.

- **Naomi’s Way** has 16 transitional units for women with children.

- Religious institutions operate the **Interfaith Rotating Shelter** that provides housing for up to 15 men for three to four months each winter. Volunteers staff the shelter overnight, make and serve dinners and provide a to-go breakfast (Interview, 2023).
- **Women Aware**, a domestic violence shelter, provides services to women and their families (Women Aware, 2023).
- In Edison, **Ozanam Family Shelter** houses 16 single women and 26 families and provides services (CCDOM; CCDOM 2, 2023).

In addition to these programs, some organizations provide support for a night or two at a hotel, but they report this is becoming more challenging. The hotels do not necessarily have space, and groups struggle to pay beyond a night or two, making this a truly temporary solution.

Recognizing the need for affordable housing, New Brunswick's 2021 five-year plan seeks to expand the number of affordable rental units, including those targeted to people who are homeless, and to expand housing voucher assistance. The City recently used HOME funds to support the construction of five supportive needs housing projects: Promise House, 2RCHP Projects, Women Aware, Dina's Dwellings, and Zebra Way (City of New Brunswick, 2021).

Additional programs include:

- **Town Clock CDC** works on affordable permanent housing with supportive services for victims of domestic violence. It built Dina's Dwellings at the Dutch Reformed Church.
- **Making it Possible to End Homelessness** is converting its transitional housing programs to permanent supportive housing. Amandla will have 46 units (MIPEH, 2023).
- The **Center for Great Expectations** in Somerset and North Brunswick provides housing with supportive services for those with addiction and mental health challenges. They provide housing for 28 at-risk families in Middlesex and Somerset County and offer telehealth services at an out-patient center (Center for Great Expectations, 2023).

Even with these additions, the city is short the affordable housing that it needs.

## Nonprofit and voluntary organizations

With very low vacancy rates, growing concern about deteriorating housing conditions, and rising rents, community organizations and tenants have launched efforts to support tenants. Interviewees stressed that many tenants do not know their rights. In an emergency situation people may take a unit in poor condition without asking questions or pressing for better quality housing.

Interviewees explained that even with support, it is often hard for tenants to work with their landlords because they may not know them. *Encargados* (property managers) may handle property transactions.

To support renters, New Brunswick Tomorrow (NBT) is producing easy-to-understand information and videos about tenants' rights in multiple languages. It has also developed programs to build tenant capacity to improve housing conditions. These efforts include hosting tenants' rights education workshops and a housing hotline as well as providing referrals. NBT staff encourage tenants who are behind on rent to work with their landlords to develop payment plans in emergency situations. In 2021, NBT helped create the New Brunswick Tenant Association (NBT, 2023). And it has since supported two campaigns. One sought to reduce the maximum allowable rent increase. The other clarifies how and when landlords can charge for water, and it provides guidance about how to divide water payments given that many individual units lack water meters. On December 6, 2023 Rutgers Advancing Development Community Program and Unity Square, Catholic Charities

hosted a “Know Your Rights” tenant and landlord meeting at Sacred Heart Parish.

Unity Square’s Housing Resource Center (HRC), supported by a NJ Neighborhood Revitalization Tax Credit (NRTC) grant, works with tenants to address evictions and habitability and to review leases. Suggesting the demand, it received 40 calls or walk-in requests for housing assistance in December 2023 for issues related to eviction, utility assistance, Affordable New Jersey Communities for Homeowners and Renters (ANCHOR) applications, property tax rebates, rent increases, and lease disputes (Unity Square, 2023).

Additionally, Catholic Charities operates a Homeless Prevention Rapid Re-Housing program that provides financial assistance for back rent, short term rental assistance, security deposits, utility deposits and debts (CCDOM2, 2023). Finally, just across the river, the Reformed Church of Highland Park

organizes efforts including refugee resettlement.

Interviewees stressed that some housing units are in poor condition and, as noted above, tenants with few choices may not feel comfortable asking for needed repairs. City government runs a Home Improvement Program for owner occupied homes with up to two units (City of New Brunswick, Housing Improvement 2024). The City has also been using the NJ Abandoned Properties Act to improve abandoned properties.

Many organizations are working hard to expand access to quality affordable housing. But the need far outstrips the current efforts. Emergency, temporary, and permanent housing including housing with supportive services and healthcare is needed. Tenants need additional support to protect their rights. And more significant efforts are needed to improve the current rental stock.



## Ideas for the Future

Our interviewees included people and organizations that have worked on issues related to housing security in New Brunswick for many years. As they described challenges, they offered a set of solutions that they thought would make a difference. We synthesized their ideas below.

### Services, healthcare, and case management

#### *Create a one stop center*

Interviewees envisioned a robust one stop center with

- A community of care that welcomes people
- Safe daytime space protected from the elements
- Dedicated spaces and resources that meet the needs of different kinds of households including seniors and families
- Peer support from people with lived experience
- Case management
- Support to access clinics to address substance abuse and harm reduction education
- Service agency representatives to explain programs and assist with applications
- Prescriber
- Lockers
- Laundry facilities
- Showers and bathrooms, towels, and personal hygiene items
- Good quality food
- Computers to access email, apply for services, and search for housing
- Assistance to gather and safely store documents needed to get ID
- Help to complete paperwork, request letters from doctors, and locate other resources
- Temporary housing units
- Housing navigator to locate affordable housing and help tenants retain it
- Job training and placement
- Transportation funds/tickets
- Medical testing, health screening, and basic tests

### *Improve service networks and delivery*

- Create a running directory of resources and services for the community to access.
- Institutionalize the City's Homelessness Roundtable and hire dedicated staff who can organize, network, maintain a website, and send out a weekly note to service providers about programs and resources.
- Provide training for hospitals, EMS, police, nonprofit and voluntary organizations, and volunteers about service networks and processes, providing care with dignity, and how to work with people who are homeless and those actively using substances.
- Expand comprehensive case management for people who are homeless. This could involve a combination of Intensive Case Management and Assertive Community Treatment as well as basic case management for unhoused people without high needs.
- Support health navigation where a staff person or volunteer accompanies someone to a hospital or doctor's appointment and acts as their advocate.
- Increase the number of beds available for people seeking to end substance abuse.
- Locate care resources in communities.
- Expand the ability to enroll people in Medicaid via a mobile device while doing outreach.
- Volunteers need clear regularly updated information about available programs and training related to providing care with dignity and de-escalation and harm reduction.

### *Link the Code Blue/Red/Orange Center to other services*

- The Code Blue/Red/Orange Center is part of a statewide emergency effort managed by New Brunswick City government. It is not structurally woven into networks of care, with the exception of being co-located in the building that houses Unity Square Community Center. This is a missed opportunity. It could be woven into health and social services including harm reduction.

## **Housing**

### *Increase the supply of good quality, affordable housing*

#### **Rental and emergency housing**

- Build a new emergency walk-in temporary shelter.
- Expand shelter beds with services.
- Create direct housing options for people who are unhoused.
- Expand the number of affordable rental units.
- Create housing plus services opportunities for people who are active substance users.
- Create a path to direct permanent supportive housing for those who need it.

### **Homeownership**

- Develop a comprehensive plan for affordable homeownership opportunities.
- Increase the number of homeownership units available.
- Explore a rent-to-own approach.
- Streamline the application to access rental and homeownership housing.

### *Improve housing quality*

- Interviewees stressed the need to improve housing quality. They described buildings and units in significant need of repair.

### *Strengthen tenants' rights education and defense and service networks*

- Interviewees highlighted the need for legal assistance including Right to Counsel. Right to Counsel has been adopted in more than a dozen cities in the US, including Newark (adopted 2018) and Jersey City (adopted 2023). Research has found that these ordinances result in better outcomes for tenants, including reductions in evictions (Cassidy and Currie, 2023). They have also been found to be revenue neutral or even positive, as they reduce expenditures for emergency services (Stout, 2023).
- Create a more formalized referral system within New Brunswick's organizations to facilitate access to programs and services.
- This network could benefit from regular meetings, updated service directories, and diagrams that show how and where to access different services.
- Create a central multilingual rental listing portal where landlords can list apartments.
- Create a standardized lease translated into languages renters in New Brunswick speak.

### *Provide emergency rental assistance*

- Pandemic related rental assistance is no longer available. And yet people are in need of emergency rental assistance. In some cases, not much money can make the difference between remaining housed and becoming unhoused.

## **Glossary**

FMR = Fair Market Rent, determined by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development

LIHTC = Low Income Housing Tax Credit

PBV = Project Based Voucher

PH = Public Housing

Section 202 = Supportive Housing for Seniors

Section 8 PBRA = Section 8 Project Based Rental Assistance

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