

# 41%

The percent of Connecticut children living in households with a high housing cost burden in 2012.<sup>1</sup>

# 978

The number of Connecticut families with a child age 0 to 5 living in emergency shelter or transitional housing during 2013.<sup>2</sup>

# 1,295

The number of Connecticut children age 0 to 5 that lived in emergency shelter or transitional housing in 2013.<sup>2</sup>

# 15%

The percent of children who are homeless and enrolled in preschool.

1. The Annie E. Casey Foundation, Kids Count Profile  
2. CT Homelessness Management Information System

## Housing & Early Childhood: Building Brighter Futures

Home, Laura Ingalls Wilder wrote, is the nicest word there is.

Early experiences are critical to children's health and wellbeing. "To develop to their full potential, children need safe and stable housing, adequate and nutritious food, access to medical care, secure relationships with adult caregivers, nurturing and responsive parenting, and high-quality learning opportunities at home, in child care settings, and in school" (Sandstrom & Huerta, 2013).

Housing must be **safe, affordable, available, and accessible** to foster positive development. Without affordable options, many children and families struggle to make ends meet:

- Family poverty increased by 50% in Connecticut between 1990 and 2014 (Annie E. Casey Foundation).
- Connecticut ranks 16th out of all U.S. states for risk of child homelessness (National Center on Family Homelessness, America's Youngest Outcasts, 2014).
- Children age 0 to 5 make up 54% of all CT children who lived in a shelter or transitional housing in 2013, which is slightly above the national average of 52% (CT HMIS, 2013).

Housing impacts early childhood development. Infants, toddlers, and preschoolers who are homeless have an **increased risk of developmental delays, physical and mental health conditions and behavioral problems**, which may continue into adulthood:

- The younger the age of the child at first entry into homelessness, the more at risk for developmental delays, lower academic achievement and increased problematic behaviors compared to other children living in poverty (Taylor, Gibson, & Hurd, under review).
- Homeless children get sick four times more often than non-homeless children, due to inadequate nutrition, healthcare and safe/secure environments. (Hart-Shegos and Associates, Homelessness and Its Effects of Children: Family Housing Fund, August 2008).



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## Housing and Early Childhood Well-Being

Housing quality, affordability and location can significantly impact early childhood development. Families who are homeless or at risk of homelessness disproportionately experience barriers such as lack of documentation, high mobility, low incomes, and lack of reliable and affordable transportation.

Living in a safe, affordable home during early childhood acts as a protective factor. Infants, toddlers, and preschoolers who are homeless have an **increased risk of developmental delays, physical and mental health conditions, and behavioral problems**, which may continue into adulthood:

- Infants born to mothers who are unstably housed or homeless are more likely to have low-birth weight, which is associated with infant mortality, respiratory illnesses, developmental delays and behavioral challenges (Institute for Children, Poverty, and Homelessness, Profiles of Risk: Child Health, 2012).
- Homeless children experience mental health problems almost four times the rate of their housed peers living in poverty (National Center on Family Homelessness, America's Youngest Outcasts, 2014).
- Children who experienced their first episode of homelessness as a toddler had a 60% increase in the odds of not meeting proficiency standards in math, compared to children who experienced their first episode of homelessness in elementary school (Fantuzzo, LeBoeuf, Brumley, & Perlman, 2013).
- Children who experienced homelessness as an infant or toddler had an increased likelihood of future involvement with the child welfare system than their housed peers (Dworsky, 2014; Perlman & Fantuzzo, 2010; Perlman & Fantuzzo, 2013).

## Many Homeless Families...and More At Risk

The numbers are compelling:

- **2,440 children in 1,348 families used Connecticut's homeless shelters and transitional housing programs in 2013** (CT HMIS, 2013).
- 73% (978) had at least one child age 0 to 5 and 24% (321) were headed by an adult between the ages of 18 and 24 (CT HMIS, 2013).
- Of these children 0 to 5, 51% were African American and 40% were Hispanic/Latino, compared to 11% and 15% in the state's general population indicating considerable racial disparities (CT HMIS, 2013).

In one sense, there is hope in those numbers, as homelessness among families decreased by 3% from 2012 to 2013. But the numbers are still high and most experts agree that many families who lack a stable home are not included in these numbers. This is because they often live doubled-up with friends and family or in motels or other temporary accommodations.

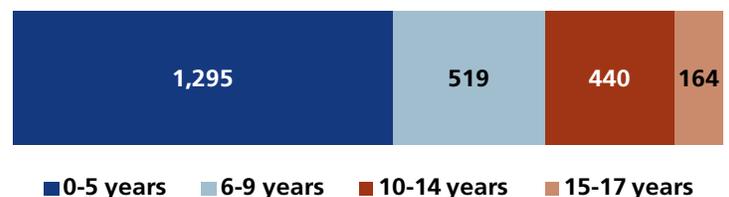
Families with children become homeless for many reasons: loss of a job, family dislocation, domestic violence, and the list goes on. But the root cause is that housing is too expensive and too unavailable. According to the National Low Income Housing Coalition (NLIHC), **Connecticut had a shortage of 90,918 units that were both available and affordable** for those earning under 30% of the area median income (NLIHC, State Housing Profile: Connecticut). This means there were only 37 affordable units available for every 100 households.

Housing remains so expensive for low income families that any change in family circumstances – unemployment, an unexpected expense, an illness – can lead to homelessness. Data show that many families are near the edge:

- Over one-third (35%) of Connecticut households are Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed (United Way of CT, ALICE Report, 2014). ALICE households are those who experience significant economic challenges and struggle to afford basic necessities such as food, health care, and child care despite holding employment.
- Median monthly housing costs remained 6th highest in the nation while median gross rent remained 10th in the nation (ACS 2013 1-Year).
- Connecticut's "housing wage" – what one must earn to afford a typical 2-bedroom apartment – remained the 8th highest in the nation at \$23.02 (\$47,000/year), an average wage level that almost half Connecticut's occupations do not reach (NLIHC, Out of Reach).

## Age Distribution of CT Children Living in Emergency Shelter or Transitional Housing in 2013

Source: CT Homeless Management Information System (HMIS)

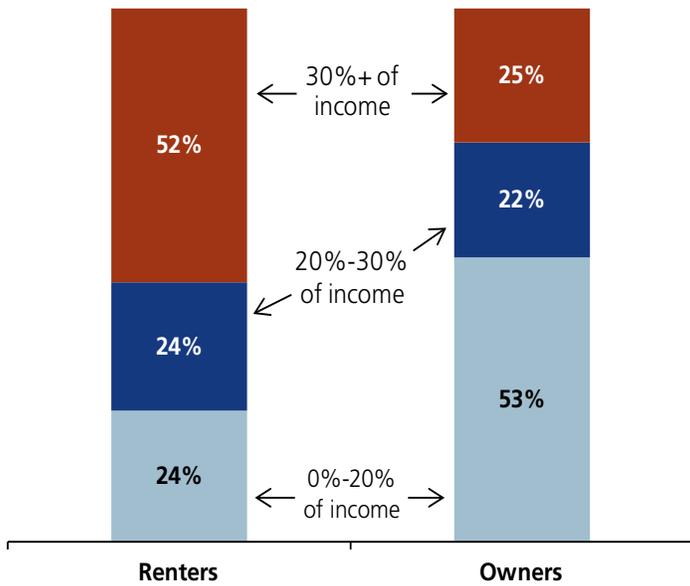


54% of children living in emergency shelter and transitional housing in 2013 were between the ages of 0-5 years; 22 children did not have an age reported in HMIS.



## Percent of Income That CT Renters & Owners Paid Toward Housing Costs in 2013

Source: American Community Survey 2013 1-Year Estimates



52% of renters and 25% of owners in CT spent more than 30% of their income on housing costs, leaving less money for other necessities.

### Immediate Solutions

Improving early childhood development and well-being cannot rely on the education system alone; it requires a comprehensive approach that addresses the multiple barriers faced by families experiencing or at risk of homelessness. Solutions include amending the state's Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) plan, increasing affordable housing across the state, providing employment services for parents, and expanding public transportation.

#### Child Care: Amend CT's CCDF Plan

Early childhood programs, such as preschool, provide children with a stable environment, support and services that improve developmental and health outcomes. Nationwide, only 15% of preschool and school-age children are actually enrolled (U.S. Department of Education, 2000, McKinney-Vento Report to Congress for Fiscal Year 2000).

**Currently Connecticut meets two of the eight policy priorities** established by the Institute for Children, Poverty, & Homelessness (ICPH, Meeting the Child Care Needs of Homeless Families, July 2014) to help families who are homeless in using child care subsidies by:

- Providing child care while a parent/guardian searches for employment.
- Waiving child care copayments for families who are homeless and have no reportable income.

**Connecticut should consider amending the state's Child Care and Development Fund** plan to further meet ICPH's recommended policy priorities by:

- Establishing homelessness as an eligibility category for receiving child care subsidies.
- Considering children who are homeless as a priority population for child care enrollment wait lists.
- Providing child care while a family searches for housing.
- Reimbursing providers at higher rates for offering child care during non-traditional hours.
- Re-determining children's eligibility every 12 months.
- Extending child care eligibility for children enrolled in Head Start.

#### Housing Assistance: Rapid Re-housing

Many families become homeless due to a financial crisis or domestic violence. Upon entering a shelter, it is extremely challenging to save enough money for a security deposit or for the first and last months' rental costs.

As a result, many families stay in shelter for weeks or months trying to overcome these types of barriers and move into permanent, stable housing. Extended or repeated stays in shelter are stressful for families and costly to government. With minimal help, these families can quickly return to stable housing.

**Rapid re-housing facilitates community connections and provides short-term financial assistance** for moving costs such as first and last months' rent, application fees, security deposits and utility connections. The program also provides housing stabilization supports.

Households receiving rapid re-housing supports are more likely to exit to permanent housing; 85% of exits from rapid re-housing among households with children are to permanent housing, compared to 32% exiting from shelter (CSH and NAEH, Ending Family Homelessness: National Trends and Local System Responses, October 2012).

#### Employment Services: Secure Jobs Connecticut Initiative

For many families experiencing homelessness, access to workforce services and supports – combined with affordable housing - will create the opportunity for more long term economic stability. Yet typically those experiencing homelessness have difficulty accessing these workforce development programs for many reasons: systems requiring housing or workforce applications,

**Children who are homeless are sick 4 times more than their housed peers.**

**Connecticut has a shortage of 90,918 affordable and available housing units.**

by their nature, are not accessible to homeless populations; the workforce training and homelessness assistance systems are too fragmented and under-resourced to adequately serve those who need both; child care options do not meet the needs of families experiencing homelessness; outcome requirements from the federal Workforce Investment Act (WIA) discourage the expenditure of financial resources to assist people who have greater needs—such as the women and families experiencing housing instability.

The Reaching Home Campaign's Economic Security Workgroup recommended the **creation of a pilot program to streamline and target employment resources directly to clients who receive rapid re-housing services**. This pilot is modeled on Massachusetts's Secure Jobs Initiative, which has assisted in the obtainment of over 300 jobs. Reaching Home, in partnership with the Melville Charitable Trust and a funders collaborative, launched the Secure Jobs Connecticut pilot in November 2014.

The Connecticut program objectives include enhanced coordination between workforce and housing systems; greater access to child care; targeted education and training services for families exiting homelessness; improved employer engagement; job retention and increased economic security of participants enrolled.

### **Expanding Transportation: First Mile/Last Mile**

Two new mass transit lines under the Malloy Administration will come online soon – the CTfastrak bus rapid transit system will begin service in 2015 and the Springfield-Hartford-New Haven commuter rail line will begin service in 2016. These transit systems will provide opportunities for low- and moderate-income households to reduce housing and transportation costs. Living in affordable units with **better access to transit** through these systems can help families with children access many more opportunities for jobs, training, education, child care and health care.

But too many low- and moderate-income families will still be living far from jobs, healthcare, fresh food and other resources. For them, a circulatory system of buses, vans, bicycles and other conveyances must be created so they can travel the “first mile” from their now disconnected homes to the mass transit lines and the “last mile” from their destination stations to their jobs, doctors and foodstores. The Partnership for Strong Communities is convening officials and advocates from many disciplines, including housing, supportive housing, mental health, disability, transportation and urban planning, to examine current effective transportation connections, where these connections are lacking, the major stakeholders and how they can contribute to providing the First/Last Mile connections Connecticut still needs.

### **Moving Forward**

The Malloy administration has provided unprecedented resources to affordable housing, which has increased the stock of affordable housing across Connecticut. Moving forward, Connecticut must continue to incentivize development of multi-bedroom affordable units that target low-income families. Affordable housing must not be developed in isolation; **housing should be linked with employment, transportation, education, child care and support services**. The convergence of housing and early childhood development – combined with innovations and inspired leadership – offer a path toward raising healthy children. Coordinated policy can allow Connecticut communities to capitalize on that opportunity.



The Partnership for Strong Communities is a statewide nonprofit policy and advocacy organization dedicated to ending homelessness, expanding the creation of affordable housing, and building strong communities in Connecticut.

We believe that a strong community begins with a home for each of its members. A home is the foundation for strong neighborhoods, economic opportunity, healthy people, and educational success.

To this end, the Partnership creates and promotes proven solutions for homelessness, supportive and affordable housing, and community development. We connect key state and federal policymakers, local officials, corporate leaders and non-for-profit organizations so that public and private resources can be wisely used to affect positive changes in policies that make our communities better places to live and work.

The Partnership was founded with a grant from The Melville Charitable Trust. We are based in Hartford, Connecticut at the Lyceum, a center dedicated to the promotion of innovative solutions to housing policy.

