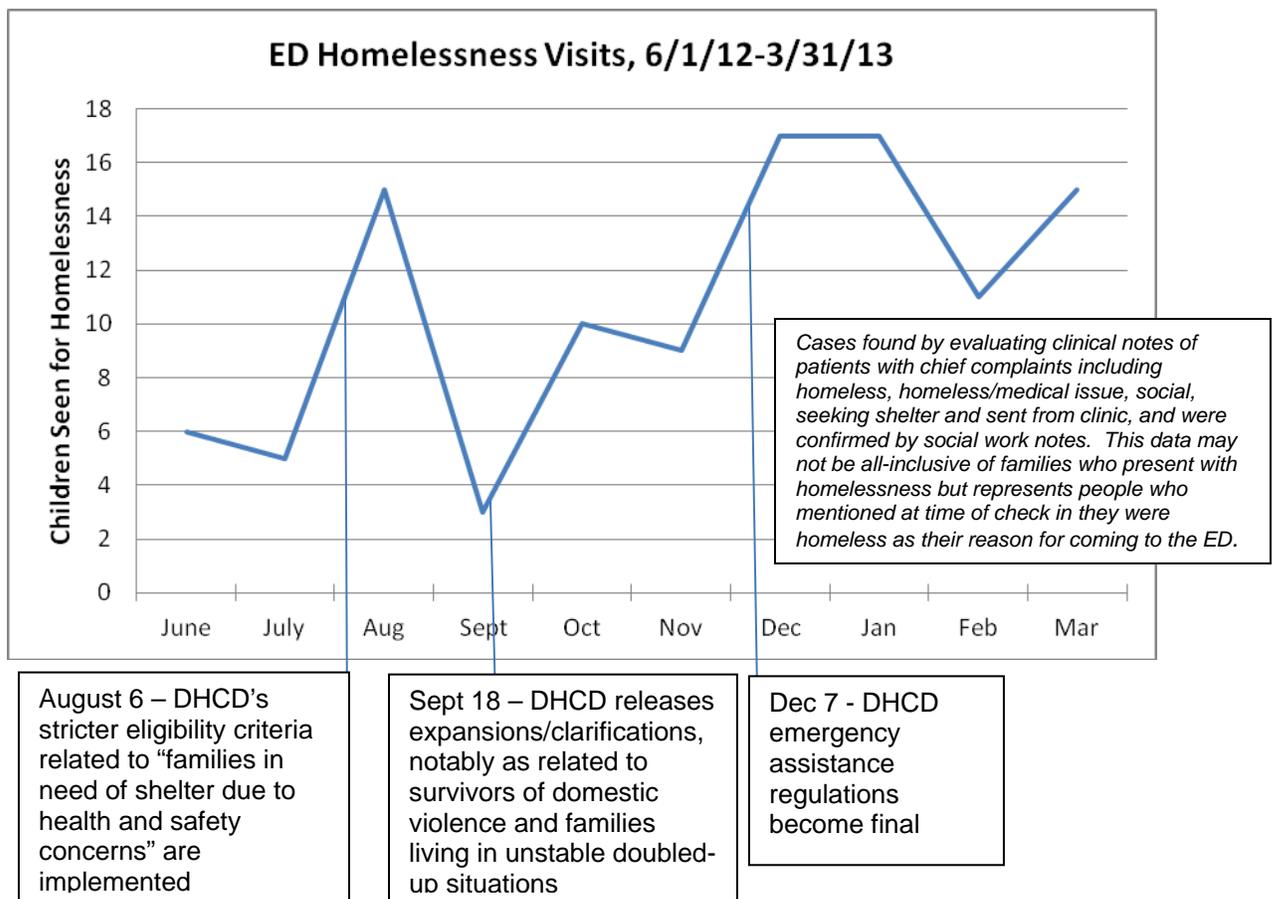


Impact of DHCD Emergency Assistance Regulations at Boston Medical Center's Emergency Department



Since June 1, 2012, there have been at least 108 visits by children under 18 to the pediatric Emergency Department (ED) at Boston Medical Center due to homelessness. All of these children, representing 68 families, were evaluated medically for illness or injury, but many came simply because they were turned away from DHCD and, in some cases, brought to the ED by DHCD workers. The average length of these visits was over 4 hours. While some families were able to find shelter for the night, others spent the night in the BMC waiting or exam room. Each case represents costs to the family, costs to the clinicians and the hospital, and, because many of these patients receive some form of MassHealth, costs to the taxpayer. The impact of the new Emergency Assistance (EA) regulations on just one emergency department are evident in the examples below. Personal identifiers have been changed to protect patient privacy.

February 2013, BMC ED, Arrival: after 11pm, 2 children - 2 & 12 years old

Children and mother had been staying with various family and friends for "a while." The family member they were currently staying with drove them to the hospital because "he had [public] housing and couldn't have guests...he'd get in trouble." Though the patient was medically cleared, the family of 3 had to wait until 10am the next day until a social worker was available, standard practice for these visits. In the interim the English-speaking 12 year-old was put in charge of making calls to find housing. The Mayor's Hotline was not able to help because "the family left housing voluntarily." The hotline recommended that the family follow-up with the housing authority in the morning. After finding no safe place to sleep for the evening, the family slept in the ED.

January, 2013, BMC ED, Arrival: 5pm, 1 child - 32 months old

A child with a chronic illness and father came to the ED seeking shelter. Per father, he had been living with the child's mother (with whom they had had no contact for 8 months) in Boston until she lost housing. The father and child had returned to Boston a month prior to the ED visit, after moving out of state to try starting over. Unable to find housing, the two returned to Massachusetts and stayed with family and friends but these options

were no longer available The two stayed with a friend for the weekend who could then no longer allow them to stay. Dad reported going to DHCD that day for housing assistance and was denied as he had been staying with a friend that weekend and had lived outside of Massachusetts for 6 months. His family options were either overcrowded or unwilling to take the pair in. The father was provided with a shelter list, phone number for the Mayor's Hotline, and shelters out of state, but had no luck. He reported calling the same shelters while at the DHCD office. Eventually the father was able to convince a family member to let them stay the night.

December 2012, BMC ED, Arrival: 8pm, 2 children – 6 & 29 months old

Mother and children had been staying with a friend who asked them to go find shelter. They did not qualify for EA or DHCD placement due to mother's departure from a shelter placement two months prior, which she attributed to her children becoming ill, three emergencies and the lack of medical institutions nearby to treat them. Without shelter, the mother considered contacting DCF to take custody of the children for the night. However, the friend was willing to take them in for the night and BMC provided car seats for the drive.

October 2012, BMC ED, Arrival: 7pm, 1 child – 4 months old

A mother, father and 4 month old child had been sleeping in their car after being evicted from their home where they could no longer afford the market rent were sent to the ED They were over-income for DHCD emergency shelter because the father worked full-time at \$13/hr. Staying locally with family was not an option due to significant over-crowding. BMC staff called Project Hope, Queen of Peace, Sisters of Charity, Inn Between, and Sojourner's House all of which were full and had no space for the patient and Mom before contacting a friend of the father, who was willing to let the family stay with him for the night. Upon discharge the family was given a shelter list so they might make additional calls. During their stay, the staff and family discussed that if housing was not secured it would be recommended that the medical team call DCF.

October 2012, BMC ED, Arrival: 7pm, 1 child - 5 years old

Father and child came to ED for homelessness. They had been residing in an apartment until a few weeks prior when they were evicted after one parent had been out of work. Since eviction, the family had been staying with different family and friends and eventually in hotels until running out of options and money that day. The mother was staying with a friend, but there was not room for the whole family, so father hoped to get shelter for himself. Both parents went to DHCD prior to the ED visit trying to get housing but were denied. Though denied, he intended to return. The father contacted all resources through the Mayor's Hotline and Traveler's Aid but found no options for himself and the child together. The only family member who would let them stay was in a housing authority home, which required notification of visitors. Despite putting this family member's housing at risk, the ED provided the family a cab voucher and they stayed there for the night. Social work staff subsequently contacted shelters on the family's behalf with no success.

In addition to the ED, Primary Care has put in numerous hours with these cases

August 2012, BMC Primary Care, 1 child – 3 months old

A mother had been living with her mom for many years but the two had a strained relationship and mom had kicked her out numerous times over the years. When she became pregnant the fighting became worse as mom did not approve of the pregnancy. Mom reported she went to DHCD requesting EA when she was 3-4 months pregnant and was denied as they claimed she "had a feasible place to stay." Mom said she went to DHCD again 6 months prior to the primary care visit, requesting EA and was denied because she "made herself homeless." Mom later reported that her mom kicked them out permanently and she went to DHCD requesting EA because she and the 3 month old would need to sleep in a car, and was denied because she was "not in imminent danger." Mom called Traveler's Aid (TA) who told her that if she could find a safe place to stay for the night they would help in the morning or she could go to BMC. Mom walked to BMC, who called TA. TA office asked mom to go to their office, where they would find her accommodations.

August 2012, BMC Primary Care, 2 children – 4 and 9 year old

A mother and her two children, ages 4 and 9 years went to DHCD accompanied by her Home For Little Wanderers worker at 10AM to request EA (new policies were implemented that morning). The family reported that they weren't seen by DHCD worker until 4:40pm. Mom provided DHCD with a "kick out" letter. The family was denied on the basis that overcrowding is no longer a valid reason to provide EA, however, the mother had never claimed overcrowding as a reason. The family remains homeless.