



Commonwealth of Massachusetts
**DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING &
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**

Charles D. Baker, Governor ◆ Karyn E. Polito, Lt. Governor ◆ Jennifer D. Maddox, Undersecretary

Shelter Realities

DHCD policy, and national best practice, is to identify safe alternatives to homeless shelter, and reserve shelter for individuals with no safe alternatives who would otherwise be sleeping in places not meant for human habitation. Individuals do best when in housing and every effort should be made to avoid placement into shelter.

If an individual is referred to a shelter they may encounter the following:

- Congregate settings
 - No private space for sleeping/hygiene/eating.
 - Many shelters do not guarantee the same bed every night.
- Lack of assistance with taking care of personal needs. Individuals in shelters must be capable of taking care of their own needs, including but not limited to:
 - Bathing, toileting, dressing, eating, administration of medication, all daily activities.
- Lack of sleeping options. Many shelters utilize bunk beds and individuals may need to be able to climb to a top bunk.
- Lack of daytime indoor options. Many shelters ask guests to leave during in the early morning and allow guests to return in the evening, which leaves individuals open to the elements if they cannot locate a day program or alternative during daytime hours.
- Time limited stays. Some shelters may have time limits on length of stay.
 - DHCD is working with shelters that they contract with in order to remove time limits, but this is a work in progress and non-DHCD funded shelters may impose their own limits.
- Lack of availability. Many shelters have reduced capacity due to COVID and may not be able to immediately accommodate a need for a shelter bed due to these limits.