

# Testing a Typology of Family Homelessness in Massachusetts: Preliminary Findings

Dennis Culhane  
University of Pennsylvania

Stephen Metraux  
University of the Sciences in Philadelphia

# Background

- Singles typology experience
- We know homeless families are different:
  - much lower MH/SA rates
  - not different from poor housed families
  - relatively homogeneous
- Potential confounders – policy/program factors
  - transitional shelter as a reform movement
  - federal policy permits 2 year stays
  - use of shelters as queuing system for subsidies

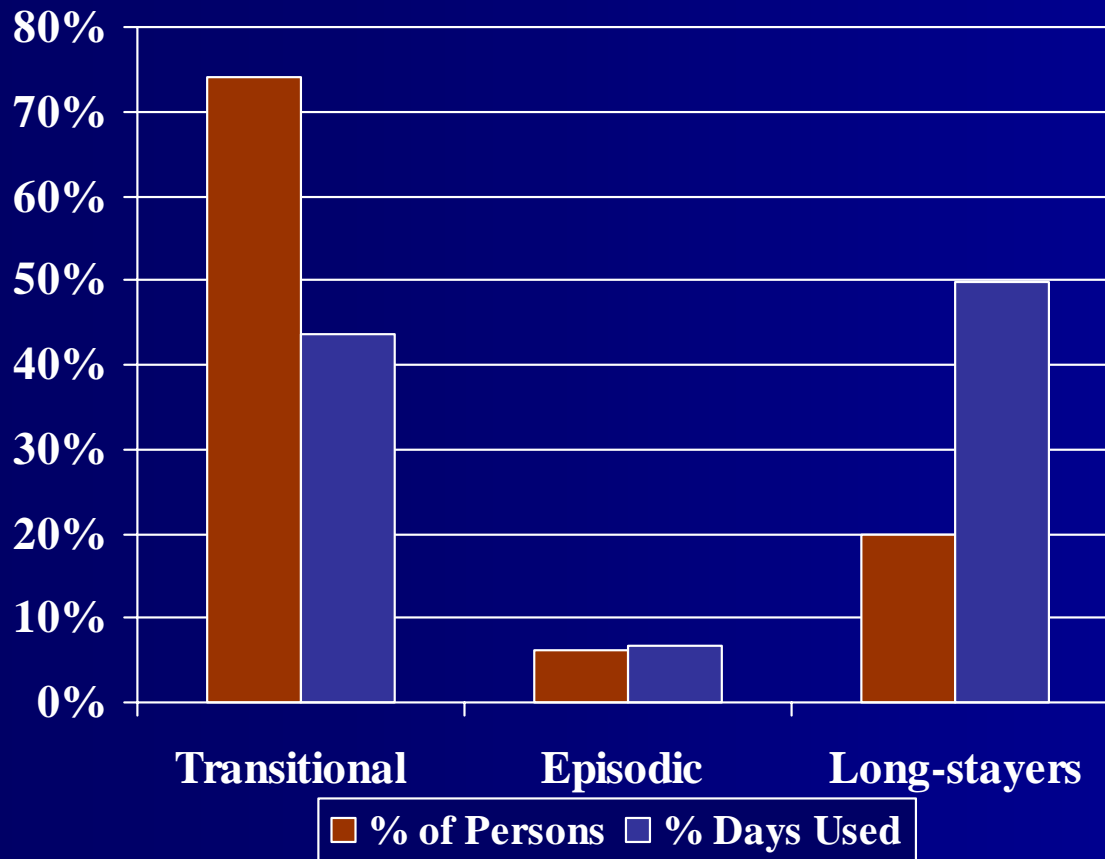
# Methodology

- HMIS data – 3 months of new admissions followed for two year period
- 30 day exit criterion applied
- Cluster analysis, specifying three cluster solution
- Database merges to identify intensive service histories
- Replicated in 3 other US cities

# Health and Social Service Databases Merged

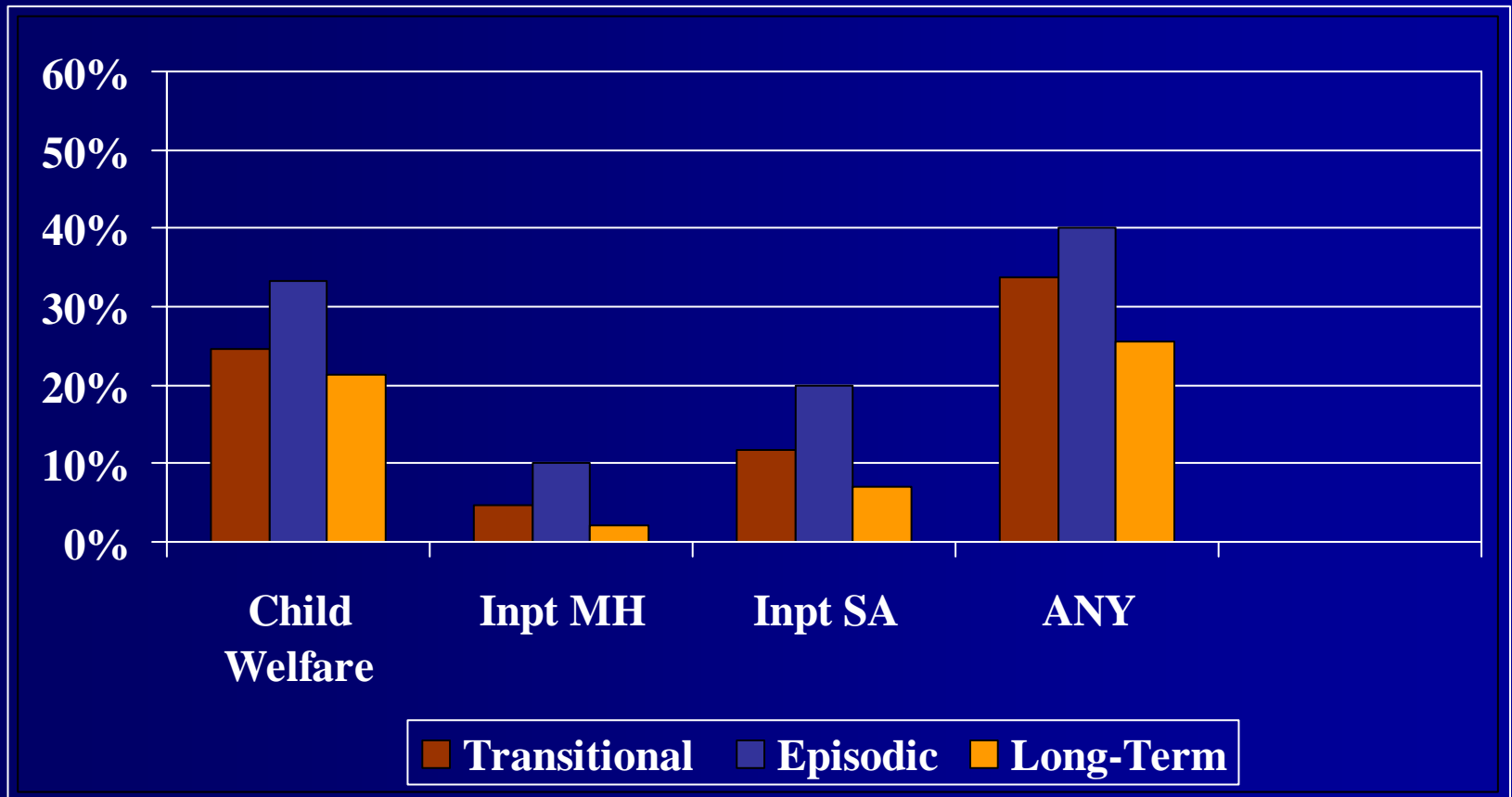
- Mental Health (Medicaid inpatient)
- Substance Abuse (inpatient/acute treatment service)
- Child Welfare (preventive and protective services)

# Results: Cluster Solution

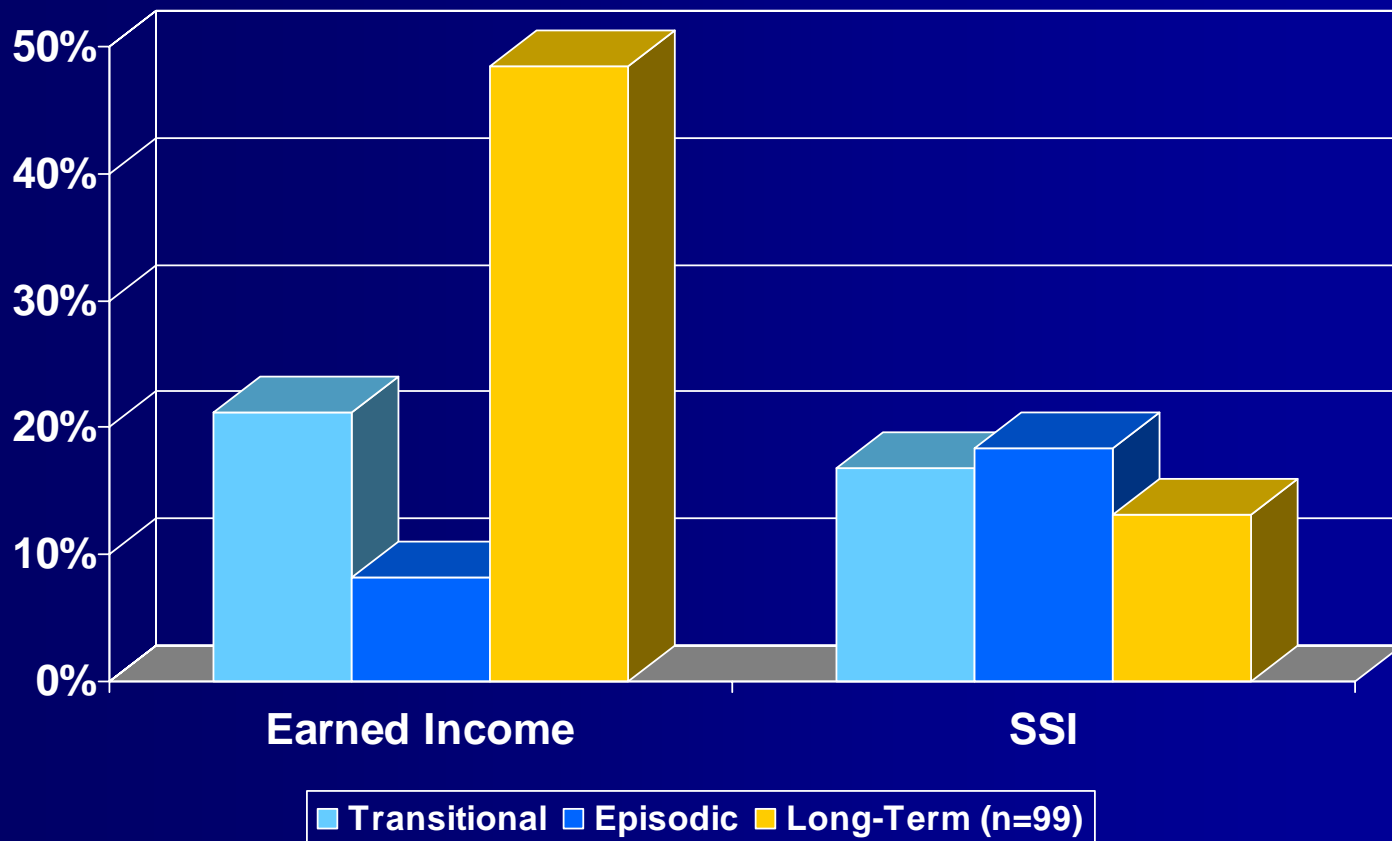


- **Transitionals:**
  - 1.0 stays
  - 105 days
- **Episodics:**
  - 2.0 stays
  - 195 days
- **Long-Stayers:**
  - 1.0 stays
  - 444 days

# Intensive Service Histories of Families



# Income Sources



# The Average Cost of Shelter Stays by Type

■ Transitional	\$11,550
■ Episodic	\$21,450
■ Long-term	\$48,440

Does not include McKinney-Vento funding or non-DTA public service contracts.

# Preliminary Conclusions

- Cluster patterns are robust across sites
- Most families (75%) leave quickly and don't return
- A small number (5-8%) return repeatedly
- 20-25% of families have long stays, using 55-70% of resources
- BUT – unlike singles – long stays do not show a greater need for support services

# Preliminary Conclusions (continued)

- Policies and programs driving long stays
- Characteristics of “graduates” may reflect selection effects of policies and programs
- Group with most intensive service history gets relatively few system resources, and group with least intensive service history gets most system resources
- Need for reform: A new conceptual framework that matches families by need to interventions that support their independence

# Model Cost by Volume Service System for Addressing Housing Emergencies

