



STATE OF CONNECTICUT
DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING



MEMORANDUM

FROM: Steve DiLella, Director of Individual & Family Support Programs

TO: DOH Funded Rapid Re-Housing Providers and CAN Staff

CC: Commissioner Seila Mosquera-Bruno, Deputy Commissioner Shante Hanks, Leigh Shields-Church, Kara Capobianco, Katie Durand, Beau Anderson, Richard Cho (CCEH), Annie Stockton (CCADV), John Merz (ACT), Michelle Molina (J. D'Amelia & Associates)

DATE: March 24, 2020

RE: Rapid Re-Housing Apartment Search & Inspection Request Protocols

Dear RRH Providers:

Thank you for your dedication and compassion as we continue to work together to protect people experiencing homelessness. Following up on DOH's March 17th [Memorandum – Rapid Re-Housing Prioritization & Paperwork Requirements during State's Declaration of Public Health & Civil Preparedness Emergency](#), we wanted to make you aware of updated guidance and share a new resource to aid you in your work. For ongoing updates pertaining to the homeless service system, please see CCEH's [Coronavirus and Homeless Resource Guide](#). Ongoing updates are also available on the [State of Connecticut website](#).

On March 20th, Governor Lamont announced that as part of the ongoing civil preparedness and public health emergency caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, he is directing Connecticut residents to "Stay Safe, Stay at Home." The governor is directing all non-essential businesses and not-for-profit entities in Connecticut to prohibit all in-person functions if they are able to, effective March 23rd at 8:00 p.m. and through April 22nd (unless modified), and encouraging them to employ, to the maximum extent possible, any telecommuting or work-from-home procedures that they can safely implement. However, the order excludes any essential business or entity providing essential services or functions, such as healthcare, food service, law enforcement, and *similar critical services*. Rapid Rehousing providers fall under this exemption as [human service providers that provide direct care/support services to an economically disadvantaged population](#).

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) have published [People Experiencing Unsheltered Homeless Interim Guidance](#) based on what is currently known of COVID-19. The guidance provides actions that stakeholders can take to protect people experiencing homelessness and service providers from the spread of COVID-19. Within this guidance, the CDC emphasizes: "Lack of housing contributes to poor health outcomes, and **linkage to permanent housing should continue to be a priority**...To prevent negative outcomes from lack of services, community leaders should continue activities that protect people experiencing homelessness, including supporting continuity of homeless services, healthcare, behavioral health services, food pantries, and linkages to permanent housing."

Continue to utilize RRH when available to quickly exit as many households from sheltered and unsheltered homelessness as possible. Below are a few suggestions of potential housing search modifications to consider. Adjustments should be tailored to the unique needs of each client. Coordinate with your local public health authority on how to assist clients who have been exposed to COVID-19 or are experiencing symptoms.

Potential Apartment Search Modifications:

- **Communication with Landlords –**
 - Before a client completes a rental application, encourage (or assist them) to contact the landlord/property management company to ensure they are still accepting applications and to discuss options for viewing the apartment (see below).
 - Landlords are feeling the impact of COVID-19 limitations. With multiple industries temporarily closing, more tenants will struggle to pay their rent at a time when evictions are temporarily paused and landlords remain responsible for paying their bills. Landlords may be more flexible in filling vacancies with prospective residents who have a subsidy, despite other potential barriers, that will sustain rental payments during this period of escalated unemployment.
 - Explain the benefits of the RRH program and how this work is part of a shared community goal to protect all CT residents and prevent the spread of COVID-19.
 - Ask landlords about digital lease signing options.

- **Virtual Apartment Tours –**
 - On March 21st, the National Apartment Association (NAA) published COVID-19 guidance for NAA members that among other actions, urged them to consider providing virtual showings to prospective clients.
 - As a precaution in protecting their existing tenants, themselves (and/or their staff) and prospective residents, landlords may be willing to offer virtual tours via Skype, Facetime, Facebook messenger or another video-conferencing platform. Landlords might create a tour video that can be shared with other prospective residents, but real-time virtual tours would be preferable so that interested clients can ask specific questions.
 - Encourage the landlord to begin or end the virtual tour outside (street view of the neighborhood).
 - Similar to an in-person viewing, encourage clients to have a list of questions prepared, such as where is the washer and dryer located, etc., and discuss with them the basics of Housing Quality Standards (HQS) prior to the virtual viewing.
 - Viewing a virtual tour (or multiple tours) could be a tool to gauge potential interest and narrow the search before appearing in-person to view the apartment, which could potentially be combined with a HQS inspection and lease signing in one visit.

- **Low-Contact Tours -**
 - NAA also urged members to consider low-contact showings for prospective residents, such as allowing a prospective resident to enter and tour a unit on their own. Landlords could let prospective residents into the apartment, practicing social distancing, or utilize a lock-box.
 - Encourage landlords to keep apartment windows open and avoid close contact (ideally 6 feet of distance).

- RRH staff could consider meeting clients at the apartment or encourage clients to view apartments with the landlord themselves.
 - Public transportation continues to be available but CT DOT will no longer accept cash from riders, individuals should limit potential exposure by spacing out at least six feet from other riders, and bus and train [schedules are modified](#).
 - Special considerations should be made for those at [higher risk for more serious complications](#) from COVID-19.
 - Before and after a viewing, RRH staff and clients should maintain good hand hygiene by washing their hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or using hand sanitizer.
 - Pre-visit, RRH staff can ask the landlord if they disinfect high-touch spaces, such as doorknobs or light switches, between showings.
- **Communication with Clients re: Apartment Search –**
- Ensure clients are aware of COVID-19 and how it is spread. See CDC COVID-19 [fact sheet](#).
 - Governor Lamont’s “Stay Safe, Stay Home” directive is not an order for residents to stay home, but instead, strongly urges residents to limit outings to necessities, such as going to the grocery store, exempted work, pharmacy, or to pick up takeout from local restaurant or provisions from local liquor/package store. Obtaining safe housing remains a basic human need.
 - Before starting apartment search, check with clients again whether they have natural supports who can permanently/temporarily house them during this public health emergency. Offer to contact that person(s) with them to assist with mediating a safe stay.
 - Ensure clients are aware of and comfortable with the challenges and potential modifications of apartment searching at this time. Clients should help create and agree to any adjustments to the standard housing search plan.
 - Emphasize to clients that you are working to assist them with securing safe housing as rapidly as possible, encouraging them to adjust their expectations accordingly. For example, encouraging them to prioritize obtaining safe accommodations versus viewing multiple apartments to find the ideal one.

Housing Quality Inspections Request:

J. D’Amelia is available to assist with completing HQS inspections for new leases. The intent is for J. D’Amelia to assist in the event that RRH staff are not able to conduct inspections due to staffing shortages. Please do not request assistance from J. D’Amelia inspectors to fully substitute your staffing functions unless absolutely necessary to do so. To assist with this process, please share the HQS checklist with landlords before the visit and ensure the landlord will have the utilities turned on. The process to request an inspection from J. D’Amelia is as follows:

Step 1: RRH submits a request for inspection assistance using the following form. The information on this form populates the “JDA Inspection Tracking” log referenced in Step 3.

<https://app.smartsheet.com/b/form/a049ca23db0c43dbba5721d4b7236141>

Step 2: JDA / Inspector completes inspection and communicates with the RRH provider regarding the HQS inspection outcome.

Step 3: A log of requested inspections has been created in Smartsheet. This log will allow DOH staff, J. D'Amelia staff, HQS Inspectors, and RRH provider staff to have communication about the status of HQS inspections. Access Inspection log to be able to track updates to pending inspection. JDA, Inspectors, and 1 RRH provider from each agency would have access. This would be the primary communication mechanism to track updates in the inspection process.

Step 4: Each RRH project needs to select **one (1)** individual who will have access to the "JDA Inspection Tracking" log. Please contact Beau Anderson at beau.anderson@ct.gov for Smartsheet access.

If you have any immediate concerns, please contact Katie Durand (Kathleen.durand@ct.gov), Kara Capobianco (kara.capobianco@ct.gov) or Leigh Shields-Church (leigh.shields-church@ct.gov). Thank you for all of your flexibility and ongoing efforts.