



STATE OF CONNECTICUT  
DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING



## MEMORANDUM

FROM: Commissioner Seila Mosquera-Bruno, Connecticut Department of Housing

TO: Connecticut Homeless Shelter Providers

CC: Deputy Commissioner Shante Hanks, Steve DiLella, Leigh Shields-Church, Kara Capobianco, Beau Anderson, Richard Cho (CCEH)

DATE: March 12, 2020

RE: Preparing Shelters for COVID-19

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DOH will be updating shelters regularly as new information emerges as providers enter a state of prevention and preparedness in response to the COVID-19 virus. We recognize that some of these measures seem extraordinary, but our hope is that over preparedness will offer the greatest safety to clients and staff. 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](#). The following protocols and updates will be in effect until the Declaration of Public Health and Civil Preparedness Emergency enacted by Governor Lamont on March 10, 2020 is lifted. This is a unique time for emergency shelter providers, and decisions are being made in an effort to **prevent** the spread of COVID-19. We anticipate that shelters will need to phase practices in overtime as public health officials anticipate that the number of individuals impacted by the virus increase in the coming weeks.

### Most immediately:

**1) DOH is asking for shelters to complete the DOH Statewide Connecticut COVID-19 Homeless Response Assessment.** You have received this link in a separate email as well. [Please click here to access the survey](#). DOH needs information from you regarding the need for cleaning supplies, cleaning protocols, physical layout of shelter beds, and staffing needs.

**2) Department of Housing will also be holding calls as often as needed, but at least twice a week for shelter providers.** A separate email will be sent with details of the weekly call.

**3) Limit in-person community meetings and use teleconferencing options to the extent possible.**

As preparedness protocols develop, and in conjunction with your respective agency and local public health recommendations, emergency shelter providers need to consider the following:

### A) Plan to remain open

- Begin planning for staffing contingencies and hiring temporary staff
- Identify bare minimum staffing patterns.
- Create cost centers in your accounting to be able to isolate costs to COVID 19

- Consider planning for food in the event volunteers and staff cannot prepare and serve meals. Local catering may be under-utilized due to cancelled events – this may be an option to purchase delivered food
- Consider telecommuting capability for non-essential staff
- If you have not been in contact already, consult with your local department of health for regular updates in your local community.

**B) Continue to aggressively pursue permanent housing exits for all your guests**

- Rapid exit funds are immediately available for Families and Individuals through CCEH
- If any guests are pending an inspection with JDA, please let DOH know to expedite
- DOH is working to increase access to RRH funding for individuals.

**C) Assess your physical layout and guest check in process**

- Is there ample space (at least 3') between sleeping cots/bunks? 6' is ideal.
- If not, can you rearrange your layout?
- Ideally guests should sleep head to toe to maximize airflow space
- Respond to the DOH survey to provide more details

**D) Clean often**

- Review and update your program's Infection Control policy. If you do not have one, CCEH will post sample plans on its website at the above hyperlink.
- If you are able to obtain your own cleaning and personal protective equipment, account for these expenses separately in the event you can be reimbursed
- If you are unable to obtain these supplies, DOH will be sending a cleaning supplies request form and we will attempt to use our State channels to obtain and deliver these supplies
- Educate yourself and your staff on proper use of masks, gloves, and disinfecting procedures. Masks should be provided to any guest who is showing respiratory symptoms immediately

**E) Begin extra Diversion at (or prior to intake)**

- Explain to guests that the State is attempting to minimize large crowds to prevent the potential spread of COVID-19. Shelters are to be used as an absolute last resort and if the person has anywhere else to stay, even temporarily, it is safer for the person to do that.
- Train all intake staff on diversion practices.
- Document all interactions, housing plans, and conversations with people who present for shelter in HMIS.
- As a reminder, shelters do not need to run at 100% capacity.

**F) Identify the at-risk guests (and staff) in your agency**

- Those over age 60 with additional health issues are most at risk of experiencing complications from COVID 19
- Consider telecommuting for at risk staff
- Regularly check-on at risk guests

**G) Extending Cold Weather Protocols**

- To ensure people have a safe place to sleep and are not out in the community unnecessarily, consider extending cold weather protocols within your agency
- DOH is evaluating the potential to extend funding to continue cold weather protocols

**H) If a guest presents with symptoms**

- Attempt to isolate the individual from other guests and provide them with a mask to wear.
- If not a medical emergency, determine basic risk factors such as recent travel to areas of high transmission or contact with someone with known COVID-19.
- Contact a healthcare provider – PLEASE DO NOT HAVE THEM SHOW UP TO THEIR PROVIDER UNANNOUNCED
- If anyone presents in respiratory distress, please call 911.
- DOH will alert shelters with testing updates as they are provided by the Dept of Public Health

Providers have raised several concerns as it relates to the following items. We are working on both immediate and contingency plans to support shelters in the following areas:

- **Staffing.** DOH is working to identify funding to support overtime costs. We are also working to develop plans in the event that staff are unable to get to work and shelters are unable to meet minimum staffing patterns.
- **Need to expand shelter space.** In the coming weeks, the spread of the virus may increase substantially. DOH is aware that communities may need to identify additional emergency shelter space to increase available personal space in shelter (3 ft. between sleeping space and 6 ft as ideal). Communities may also need to identify isolated space where symptomatic individuals can recovery in place. DOH is also investigating the ability of shelters to be able to create spaces within the shelter for those that are experiencing COVID-19 symptoms and those that are not experiencing COVID-19 symptoms. DOH is exploring funding options to expand the need.
- **Increase Diversion Resources for Individuals.**

As preparedness efforts ramp up, DOH will disseminate information on structured communication channels. As always, if you have any immediate concerns, please contact either Kara Capobianco ([kara.capobianco@ct.gov](mailto:kara.capobianco@ct.gov)) or Leigh Shields-Church ([leigh.shields-church@ct.gov](mailto:leigh.shields-church@ct.gov)). Thank you for all of your efforts as we remain diligent in creating a safe environment for our guests and staff.