



**COVID-19**

# Homeless System Response: Coordinated Investment Planning: How the Sacramento COVID-19 Response Team is Collaborating to Enhance Rehousing Strategies

Coordinated investment planning strategically aligns and commits resources from multiple sources to fund a community's rehousing strategy through a collaborative planning process. Sacramento County, the city of Sacramento, and the Continuum of Care (CoC) pulled together to develop the [Sacramento COVID-19 Homelessness Response Plan](#), a coordinated investment response plan to assist people at risk of or experiencing homelessness during COVID-19. Their effort demonstrates how strong collaboration, coordinated investment, and transparent communication can help communities maximize available resources and implement permanent housing strategies.

In the first phase of planning in response to COVID-19, Sacramento responded to the immediate needs of people experiencing homelessness by keeping existing shelters operational, quickly establishing new isolation and quarantine shelters, and supporting encampments with increased outreach, supply, and sanitation services. As of August 28, 2020, over 1,100 people have been served in 581 rooms in leased motels and new trailers. Additionally, over 80 encampments were identified through increased outreach and provided with sanitation services when possible.

With increased numbers of people in shelter and new connections to encampments, Sacramento is quickly pivoting to implement a rehousing strategy using a coordinated investment planning framework. This framework includes a local planning group, improved connections to community groups, a resource and funding inventory, and developing public reports to communicate the impact of this effort.

## Vision and Leadership

Sacramento's coordinated investment planning group is jointly led by representatives from the city, county, the Sacramento Housing and Redevelopment Agency, and Sacramento Steps Forward, the lead agency for the CoC. Within this leadership group, there are several teams, including a response team to track ongoing crisis needs due to COVID-19 and a rehousing team that focuses on moving individuals into existing permanent housing and pursuing motel acquisition for new permanent supportive housing. The team meets three times each week to review activities.

To reach the overall goal of rehousing up to 500 households into stable, permanent housing, the group developed several strategies, including:

- Extending current preventative isolation and medical quarantine motel room leases through September to allow for more rehousing case management;
- Recommending allocation of an additional \$4.3 million in city and county Coronavirus Relief Funds (CRF) to provide short-term services and rental assistance;
- Working to acquire and rehabilitate motels for use as permanent supportive housing, exploring the use of state and local CRF funding, Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funding, and traditional affordable housing financing; and
- Developing a coordinated referral system that works across agencies to expedite rehousing case management and support services.

## Building Partnerships

The group leaders had existing relationships that strengthened their ability to work together and jointly own the coordinated investment planning process, bringing in partners such as organizations serving veterans and transition-age youth. They recognized that new partnerships were necessary to build a robust investment strategy.

The homeless response plan's leadership group has improved connections with volunteer and grassroots organizations that do not participate in the CoC. These groups provide infrastructure and staffing support to encampment strategies. The community groups also have diverse leaders and representatives with lived experience, which has created a platform to get feedback about equity and advocacy objectives within the coordinated investment plan.

Building linkages with hospital systems, community clinics, county public health departments, and motel management has also been key in this effort. The group focused on leveraging existing connections to social service systems in addition to building new pathways for individuals who were disconnected from the system (including those exiting from institutions). These enhanced referral pathways are routed through Sacramento Steps Forward as a centralized coordinator, tracking all individuals no matter their entry point into the rehousing network.

These new connections have brought parties together in new ways and informed ongoing planning. Leaders in the housing and homelessness sector remained committed to open lines of communication and building trust throughout partner agencies. Initially, this intentionality led to the perception that the process was moving slowly, but the investment has paid off in the long-term. The new referral system has filled all available motel rooms, prioritizing those most vulnerable to COVID-19, and generated the resources needed to bring another motel site into the system. It has also created a sense of collective ownership, where each agency shares challenges and works to solve them together. Seeing connections between different groups also allows leadership to take a systems approach to coordinated investment, targeting improvements that can last beyond the current crisis rather than just moving people indoors temporarily.

## Securing Funding

Through the work of the local homelessness planning group, approximately \$5 million is pending final approval for assistance to households experiencing homelessness in support of the rehousing plan, for a total of over \$19 million allocated for the COVID-19 homelessness response. This includes increasing funding for Sacramento County's flexible housing subsidy pool.

The team is also coordinating resources from other programs to incorporate into their plan. This includes Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF), which has fully embraced the partnership and dedicated resources to rehousing veterans currently in motel rooms or identified encampments. The County Department of Health Services is also exploring ways to expand Medi-Cal billing (California's Medicaid system) for services in motels acquired for permanent supportive housing. Whole Person Care, a Medi-Cal pilot program administered through the City of Sacramento, has also modified their intake process to accommodate clients in motels.

## Reporting and Transparency

Early into their response, leadership for the homelessness response plan developed [weekly data reports](#) that are shared publicly. This transparency communicates activities and impact not only to partners, but also to taxpayers. The data used in this report primarily comes from the Homeless Management Information System and is displayed in a dashboard that documents the work of the team, best practices, and client demographics. The team has set up a centralized email inbox for public and client feedback, which is shared with key stakeholders. Additionally, the group shares a central point of contact for media requests, which has improved the consistency of messaging and communication.

This transparency and intentionality with messaging and data has strengthened the notion that rehousing is a coordinated effort among agencies. With this transparency, the team aims to improve trust with other government entities, nonprofits, advocacy groups, elected officials, and the public. It highlights that the current open organizational practices are having a positive impact in the community and has created a foundation for future coordination after current stimulus funds and flexibilities end.

The coordinated investment strategy Sacramento created to address COVID-19 leverages the strengths of individual agencies, creates mutual ownership, and draws on all available resources to quickly move people into permanent housing. In the long term, it has renewed interest in taking a systems view to create a more intentional pathway to housing in the area. This infrastructure intends to rehouse and stabilize people (rather than focusing solely on moving people through the shelter system) and is being nurtured to last well beyond the immediate need.