

Homeless System Response: Framework for Enhancing Safety in Your Homeless Response System

Six months after the coronavirus began to spread throughout the U.S., COVID-19 remains an active threat to the life and health of people experiencing homelessness, especially Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC), older adults, and [those with chronic health conditions](#). While rates of infection, community spread, and available testing continue to vary widely, people unable to social distance and without adequate hygiene resources—such as people experiencing homelessness—remain at increased risk from rapidly spreading [outbreaks](#). Regardless of the current status of the outbreak in their community, Continuums of Care (CoC), Emergency Solutions Grants (ESG) recipients, and their community partners require ongoing, comprehensive, and adaptable strategies for enhancing the safety of the people they serve.

The ideal framework for enhancing safety in your homeless response system will:

- Incorporate evolving public health guidance around best practices for reducing disease transmission in settings such as congregate shelters and encampments; and
- Recognize that permanent housing provides a safer environment than settings such as congregate shelters and encampments, where crowding and proximity to others can heighten risk for an already high-risk population.

To address both components of this framework, inter-agency community planning must weave together protections for people living in high-risk settings with a path to speed their transition into safe and sustainable housing.

A comprehensive, strategic framework for enhancing safety in your homeless system should address the following needs:

1. Develop and sustain close coordination with public health and health care providers.
2. Prevent virus spread within the sheltered population and in other congregate settings.
3. Maintain essential services, including outreach, for unsheltered people.
4. Deploy [targeted coronavirus testing](#).
5. Ensure the availability and proper use of [Personal Protective Equipment \(PPE\)](#).
6. Accelerate rehousing processes, especially for the people with high COVID-19 risk.
7. Keep people out of the shelter system and off the streets through prevention and diversion.

For additional guidance, refer to the [Disaster Response Rehousing](#) or [Disease Risk and Homelessness](#) webpages. Both pages are updated as new information emerges and organize, by topic, guidance documents issued by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the National Health Care for the Homeless Council (NHCHC), and other organizations.

Getting Started: Critical Guidance and Best Practices Resources

NEED: Develop and sustain close coordination with public health and health care providers.

- [Operational Healthcare Partnerships](#) provides examples of initiatives that focus public health and healthcare expertise and resources on protecting people experiencing homelessness. They emerged from community [coalition-based COVID-19 prevention and response planning](#). The [Checklist for Homeless Service Providers During Community Re-Opening](#) provides homeless service providers with a list of considerations for safe service delivery as the surrounding community reopens.

NEED: Prevent virus spread within the sheltered population and in other congregate settings.

- Infection control within shelters and other service sites:
 - [COVID-19 Infection Control Inventory and Planning \(ICIP\) Tool for Homeless Service Providers](#) provides a starting point for working with public health departments to develop an infection prevention and control protocol to reduce the risk of infectious disease transmission in homeless service group settings.
 - [Infectious Disease Toolkit for CoCs: Preventing & Managing the Spread of Infectious Disease Within Shelters](#) guides CoCs through the process of planning and implementing comprehensive sanitation guidelines for shelters to prevent the spread of infectious diseases.
 - [Homeless Shelter Worker Training](#) provides a helpful slide deck for training shelter workers about best practices for keeping staff and clients safe from COVID-19.
 - [COVID-19 Guidance for Shared or Congregate Housing](#) offers guidance for owners, administrators, and operators of shared or congregate housing sites on how to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in facilities.
- Effective social distancing, isolation, and care:
 - [Non-Congregate Sheltering: Approaches for COVID-19 Homeless Response and Recommendations for Requests for Assistance](#) outlines methods for separating, isolating, and protecting homeless system clients in shelter settings.

NEED: Maintain essential services including outreach, food, and water to the unsheltered population.

- [Essential Services for Encampments During an Infectious Disease Outbreak](#) outlines steps communities can take to ensure that people living unsheltered, including those in encampments, avoid becoming sick due to challenges related to sanitation, infection control, and access to food and water.
- [Interim Guidance on Unsheltered Homelessness and Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\) for Homeless Service Providers and Local Officials](#) provides a comprehensive list of considerations to assist outreach programs with the development of a plan to protect the safety of staff and clients.
- [Infectious Disease Toolkit for CoCs: Preventing & Managing the Spread of Infectious Disease within Encampments](#) outlines steps for CoCs to consider when working with local stakeholders to develop and implement sanitation guidelines and outreach strategies to prevent infectious disease spread within homeless encampments.

NEED: Work with public health partners to deploy targeted coronavirus testing.

- [Interim Considerations for Health Departments for SARS-CoV-2 Testing in Homeless Shelters and Encampments](#) provides a detailed outline of considerations for developing coronavirus testing strategies for the most vulnerable groups served by CoCs and ESG recipients.
- [Strategies for Proactive Universal Testing](#) provides guidance for conducting universal testing before a cluster of positive cases emerges as a strategy for identifying early virus spread in shelters, encampments, or other high-risk settings and effectively separating individuals before a broader community outbreak occurs.

NEED: Ensure the availability and proper use of PPE.

- Maintaining PPE supplies:
 - [Optimizing Supply of PPE and Other Equipment during Shortages](#) provides a framework for collaborating with public health and health care providers to minimize PPE shortages and ensure that PPE is readily available in the most critical settings.

- Proper PPE use:
 - [Using Personal Protective Equipment \(PPE\)](#) outlines the proper use of PPE.

NEED: Accelerate rehousing processes, especially for the people with high COVID-19 risk.

- [Rehousing Activation: Planning and Implementation Tips](#) and [Advancing Racial Equity through Assessments and Prioritization](#) outline how communities can strategically plan and implement a rehousing strategy to quickly rehouse people experiencing homelessness, with a special focus on BIPOC, who are [disproportionately at risk for both homelessness and severe illness or death from COVID-19](#).
- [Planning a Housing Surge to Accelerate Rehousing Efforts in Response to COVID-19](#) outlines steps to enhance safety in your homeless response system by employing a concentrated, time-limited community effort through which key stakeholders collaborate to connect a targeted group of households to a pre-identified pool of housing subsidies and units as well as other resources and services.
- [Supporting Individuals Exiting Isolation or Quarantine](#) helps guide communities in establishing policies and procedures to ensure that people being discharged from isolation or quarantine following illness or exposure to COVID-19 receive appropriate transitional supports that help them to successfully recover, remain safe, and move on to stable housing.
- [Changes to Coordinated Entry Prioritization to Support and Respond to COVID-19](#) describes how adjusting CE policies and procedures can speed up connections to permanent housing for people at high risk of COVID-19 complications.

NEED: Keeping people out of the shelter system and off the streets through prevention and diversion.

- The [Homelessness Prevention Resources](#) web page includes three documents to help communities minimize the loss of housing among those most likely to become literally homeless through strategic targeting of resources and applying a racial equity lens:
 - [A Framework for Homelessness Prevention](#)
 - [Homelessness Prevention: Effective and Efficient Prevention Programs](#)
 - [Prevention to Promote Equity](#)
- [Five Things to Consider When Investing ESG in Homelessness Prevention](#) outlines strategic considerations for effectively and efficiently investing ESG funding in targeted interventions that help maintain stable housing for households that are most likely to have experienced a stay in shelter or in an unsheltered location and are least likely to avoid shelter or street homelessness on their own.
- [Strategies for Eviction Prevention](#) highlights how to design effective eviction prevention programs and deploy targeted prevention to promote racial equity and prioritize groups at greatest risk of homelessness. It also provides links to a number of helpful resources and community examples.