



Housing is Healthcare: Responding to COVID-19 in a Comprehensive and Systemic Way Coalition for the Homeless Recommendations for Immediate Policy Responses

Homeless New Yorkers Experience Compounding Risks for Exposure to COVID-19 as well as Increased Risks of Serious Symptoms and/or Complications

- Homeless New Yorkers in shelters:
 - Cannot isolate at home and cannot practice social distancing due to congregate design of shelters.
 - Who are members of families are too often deemed ineligible for a shelter placement by intake workers, and then told to return to a crowded intake facility or turned away altogether.
 - Are not adequately screened upon entry to shelters.
 - May not be able to wash their hands as frequently as needed due to lack of soap, shared bathrooms, and inoperable fixtures.
 - Live in environments where the necessary levels of cleaning and sanitation may not be effectively implemented, especially in light of the large number of individuals using the facilities and lack of adequate maintenance staffing.
 - May face serious shortages of core shelter staff to provide food and cleaning services.

- Homeless New Yorkers on the streets or in the transit system:
 - Face a critical lack of access to food and bathrooms, as soup kitchens, restaurants, gyms, and other businesses close or suspend operations.
 - Do not have access to basic supplies including hand sanitizer, wipes, socks, toiletries, and blankets.
 - Face increased shortages of basic resources, including clothing, as well as increasingly limited access to day centers, libraries, and other public safety net programs.
 - Face increased exposure to COVID-19 because they live in public spaces.
 - Experience highly intensified levels of stress and isolation on the streets that exacerbate symptoms of serious mental illnesses as well as chronic and acute physical health conditions.

- A significant percentage of homeless New Yorkers are considered at high-risk, including seniors as well as adults and children with underlying health conditions such as respiratory conditions, diabetes, heart ailments, compromised immunity, etc.

Immediate Action is Required

Shelter and Outreach Policies

- DHS must immediately suspend all eligibility investigations for families applying for shelter at PATH and AFIC, provide immediate needs placements to all households coming through the front door, and cease requiring that children report to PATH for any reason.
- DHS must implement thorough up-front screening and triage for all people entering all shelters, including deploying the use of thermometers to take people's body temperature.
- DHS must preemptively identify people in shelters and known to outreach teams who are at high risk for exposure and infection, provide isolation options for them, and monitor them closely for symptoms.
- DHS must provide private space for isolation of symptomatic individuals, either through hotels, unused hospital space, or other available single room occupancy locations.
 - Other methods of isolation for groups of shelter residents at high risk may need to be explored.
- DHS must ensure that individuals who are unsheltered have access to basic hygiene supplies, including hand sanitizer, socks, blankets, wipes, and any other items they may need to keep themselves warm, dry, and healthy.
- The City must immediately provide access to public restrooms for individuals sleeping on the streets and in transit systems.
- DHS must expand drop-in center capacity and provide expanded resources for individuals needing showers, bathrooms, indoor space, and supplies. Unused facilities should be brought on line quickly in order to give homeless people safe indoor spaces in which to obtain these services.
- DHS must provide clear, constant, and up-to-date communication to individuals living in shelters and on the streets. Multiple types of communication should be provided, including written materials and a hotline to answer questions or provide basic information.
- DHS must ensure all shelters are adequately staffed to provide basic needs and safety.
- DHS must make sure shelter staff have adequate access to supplies that will help them stay safe while working, including but not limited to disinfecting wipes, hand sanitizer, soap, face masks, and gloves.
- DHS must immediately suspend the Income Savings Plan program for single adults and halt its planned implementation for families.
- DHS, in conjunction with DOE, must make sure all homeless students in shelters have the space and technology, including WiFi, to participate in remote learning.

Public Assistance

- New York State must immediately authorize basic needs allowances for individuals in shelters and on the streets, including for those who are presently receiving the much smaller personal needs allowances.

- New York State must immediately suspend local requirements to pay shelter rent or participate in mandatory savings programs or program fee agreements as a condition of receiving shelter.

Housing

- The Federal government should provide significant emergency funds for housing assistance to New York City, including Section 8 vouchers and the Disaster Housing Assistance Program, for individuals and families experiencing homelessness.
- New York State must immediately pass and fully fund the Home Stability Support program (HSS) in the State budget.
- New York State and City must continue the moratorium on evictions until such time as the economy has fully recovered.

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