



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.
 - 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 provide tens of thousands of hotel rooms for homeless individuals in congregate shelters and those living on the streets in order to facilitate appropriate social distancing, access to private bathrooms and showers, and safe places to isolate and recover. Immediate access to hotel rooms must be provided to:
 - Symptomatic and/or COVID-19 positive individuals;
 - All unsheltered homeless individuals;
 - People in shelters and on the streets who are at high risk for complications of infection; and
 - All newly homeless and currently homeless individuals without an assigned shelter bed.
- 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. Anyone who exhibits a temperature above the threshold of 100.3 or who is experiencing shortness of breath or a cough should immediately be sent to an isolation facility, if they do not need hospitalization.
- 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 and showers for individuals sleeping on the streets and in transit systems. Furthermore, DHS should pair drop-in centers with hotels to reduce overcrowding at drop-in centers.
- 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, in conjunction with DOE, must make sure all homeless students in shelters have the space and technology, including WiFi, to participate in remote learning. Additionally, the City should allow homeless students to access the new Regional Enrichment Centers.
- The City must immediately end the criminalization of street homelessness, by halting all street sweeps and ending the Subway Diversion Program.

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 emergency and permanent housing assistance for homeless New Yorkers, including but not limited to Emergency Solutions Grants (ESG), Community Development Block Grants, and Section 8 vouchers.
- 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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