



Mendocino County Health & Human Services Agency

Healthy People, Healthy Communities

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Memo

DATE: March 30, 2020

TO: Homeless Ad Hoc Members: Supervisor John McCowen and Supervisor Dan Gjerde

CC: Carmel Angelo, Chief Executive Officer

FROM: Tammy Moss Chandler, HHSA Director

SUBJECT: Prevention Actions in Response to COVID-19 for Individuals Experiencing Homelessness

People experiencing homelessness are at especially high risk for infection during an outbreak of COVID-19. Mendocino County took early action in an effort to prevent an outbreak of COVID-19 among the homeless population and other vulnerable groups.

Supporting Shelter Service Providers to Prevent and Manage the Spread of Infectious Disease for People Experiencing Homelessness in Congregate Settings

In early March, Mendocino County identified all congregate care facilities in the County and reached out to assess the infectious disease prevention plans of each facility. This included an onsite assessment of all three homeless shelters within the County utilizing guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) specifically for homeless shelters.

Mendocino Coast Hospitality Center agreed with very short notice to continue their emergency winter shelter, which was scheduled to close on March 15, 2020. This continuation was requested in order to fully assess the age and health needs of the emergency winter shelter population, but was particularly important to continue with the Shelter-In-Place orders that were implemented beginning March 18, 2020.

Providing in place supports and social distancing practices have required the deployment of new strategies, employee flexibility and service expansion. The County is working with Building Bridges/Redwood Community Services in Ukiah and Mendocino Coast Hospitality Center in Fort Bragg to de-intensify the current homeless shelter system to allow for appropriate social distancing. This includes exploring hotel and motel options for people with specific health risks who can better shelter in place in a non-congregate sheltered setting. This use of hotel and motel rooms provides general risk reduction by decreasing the density of group sheltering, and can also help strengthen supports for people experiencing homelessness who are at increased risk of adverse mental health outcomes.

The County Health and Human Services Agency (HHSA) has also expanded screening and data tracking protocols for those experiencing homelessness who were associated with HHSA's

specialized programs utilizing local hotels before COVID-19, including programs for families with children, seniors, and individuals with disabilities.

Outreach to Unsheltered Populations to Prevent and Manage the Spread of COVID-19

HHSa has coordinated with local Continuum of Care service providers to educate, screen, and assess the needs of unsheltered populations. This includes surveying approximately 50 people who are residing in encampments.

Approximately half those surveyed were not aware of the COVID-19 pandemic and the Shelter in Place orders, and benefited from education on social distancing and the provision of personal hygiene supplies. Approximately 20 people were over the age of 65 or had medical conditions that make them high risk for severe illness from COVID-19. These individuals were offered the option of entering into an appropriate shelter environment to help prevent infection and manage any potential spread of COVID-19. Service providers have triaged participants to determine the most strategic option, whether hotel/motel or congregate shelter environments.

Consistent with CDC recommendations, HHSa is working with high risk individuals who are willing to relocate and shelter in place. The CDC does not recommend clearing or moving encampments, which results in dispersing people throughout the community.

Individuals experiencing homelessness who are sheltered in hotel rooms must sign a service agreement and receive supportive services from Continuum of Care service providers. Individuals who are sheltered in a congregate environment must agree to follow the rules of that shelter, including adjusting to new requirements for social distancing.

Appropriate Isolation and Quarantine Venues for People Experiencing Homelessness

Mendocino County's Emergency Operations Center has completed an advanced plan to establish and maintain Isolation and Quarantine sites for individuals experiencing homelessness. This plan is specifically for people who do not require medical support within hospitals or skilled nursing facilities, and includes transportation after testing in order to safely isolate. Additional information about Mendocino County's interim response plan for isolation and quarantine will be provided by Bekkie Emery and the Office of Emergency Services.

Links to Reference Documents:

- State of California Recommended Strategic Approaches for COVID-19 Response for Individuals Experiencing Homelessness, March 2020
<https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/CDPH%20Document%20Library/COVID-19/Protocols-Homeless-Pop.pdf>
- State of California COVID-19 Recommended Protocol for People Experiencing Homelessness
<https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/CDPH%20Document%20Library/COVID-19/flowchart-COVID19-homelessness.pdf>
- National Health Care for the Homeless Council COVID-19 Issue Brief, March 2020
<https://nhchc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Issue-brief-COVID-19-HCH-Community.pdf>
- CDC resources to support people experiencing homelessness
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/homeless-shelters/index.html>
- US Interagency Council on Homelessness <https://www.usich.gov/covid-19/>