

Preventing the Spread of COVID-19
Project Roomkey: Emergency Housing for Immediate Protection
Fact Sheet

Urgent Need for Non-Congregate Sheltering

The State of California is acting quickly to protect public health and safety as we respond to novel coronavirus (COVID-19) and is mobilizing every level of government to prepare for and respond to spread of the virus.

California has a demonstrated need for hotel and motel rooms around the State to immediately provide non-congregate shelter options for the sick and medically vulnerable. Individuals lacking stable housing are more likely to use hospital emergency rooms. In some places, individuals experiencing homelessness made up 20% to 30% of all adult hospital emergency room visits. Patients experiencing homelessness are admitted to inpatient units 5 times more often, and have average lengths of stay that are longer than people who have stable housing. Protecting individuals experiencing homelessness will relieve pressure on the hospital system by separating high-risk individuals who are homeless from COVID-positive or persons under investigation (PUI), in order to protect public health and safety for the duration of this Public Health Emergency.

On March 18, 2020 the Governor announced a [significant investment](#) to support this urgent need. This includes:

- [\\$100 million](#) directly to local governments and Continuums of Care for shelter support and emergency housing to address COVID-19 among the homeless population, administered by the Business, Consumer Services and Housing Agency, and
- \$50 million available to establish occupancy agreements to secure rooms in hotels, motels, and other facilities including trailers, administered by the California Department of Social Services (CDSS).

The goal of this effort is to provide non-congregate shelter options for people experiencing homelessness, to protect human life, and minimize strain on health care system capacity. The majority of [Project Roomkey expenditures are federally reimbursable under FEMA](#), for both hotel/motel room occupancy agreements and operating services, at 75 percent federal share of cost. *[Care should be taken to ensure that adequate information is collected, and processes followed, to ensure such reimbursement is possible. See [FEMA's procurement guidance](#) for more information.]* **Therefore, the \$150 million investment above leverages significantly more federal funding.**

How Should Populations Be Protected?

Based upon the latest public health guidance, it is recommended that persons known to be COVID-positive or known to have been exposed to COVID but not requiring hospitalization, and those with high-risk factors such as age over 65, chronic health conditions, and respiratory issues, be separated from other people. Individual living arrangements, such as private rooms at hotels and motels, are recommended for these populations. Congregate care is not recommended at this time, although it may be an option for low-risk and otherwise-healthy persons experiencing homelessness.

Counties and tribes are strongly encouraged to use all available local, state, and federal funding to secure hotel/motel rooms, and to provide the onsite supportive services needed to support these properties as emergency housing for immediate protection. In many cases, occupancy agreements with property owners allow the owners to continue to operate the property, while allowing the county or tribe to focus its resources on the provision of site supervision, security, laundry, sanitation, and other services, as applicable and necessary to successfully achieve the goals of these efforts. In addition, counties and tribes should consider utilizing economically displaced workers to provide onsite resources.

Counties and tribes are most familiar with their community needs and resources, and therefore are best suited to use their local and state resources to meet identified needs. Counties and tribes are encouraged to anticipate the number of individuals in need of emergency housing for protection, identify appropriate geographical locations, and the core operating services and supports necessary to keep vulnerable individuals safe.

All of these local efforts should be closely coordinated with applicable local partners, including cities, housing and public health agencies, homeless Continuums of Care, behavioral health, labor, nonprofit organizations and others with experience servicing this population, other county and tribal departments, and health care departments and providers, inclusive of telehealth options. It is important that the service and any applicable accessibility accommodations are taken into consideration as individuals are moved into emergency housing. These include providing accessible rooms for individuals with access or functional needs and supporting individuals with other needs that can be provided onsite.

Operationally, local and tribal governments are responsible for identifying which clients are to be prioritized for emergency housing options. A [FEMA approval letter](#) describes the populations that are eligible for FEMA reimbursement, and the information that must be collected for each individual participating in Project Roomkey. Counties and tribes also are responsible for providing transportation to the emergency housing sites, site management, and essential wraparound health services including behavioral health services. Local law enforcement or contracted security services may support the operation as needed.

What Guidance is Available?

- [State guidance for homeless assistance](#) providers was published on March 18, 2020 by the Business and Consumer Services and Housing (BCSH) Agency. The guidance identifies how to prevent disease spread among clients and staff in shelters, provides considerations for sheltering individuals who are at risk of infection, including in hotel/motels, and outlines available funding resources.
- In partnership with Margot Kushel, MD and the UCSF Benioff Homelessness and Housing Initiative, [Recommended Strategic Approaches for COVID-19 Response for Individuals Experiencing Homelessness](#) and a [Flow Chart: COVID-19 Recommended Protocol for People Experiencing Homelessness](#) are available for local use to support local communities in prioritizing the isolation of individuals experiencing homelessness
- [Resources for people experiencing homelessness](#) published by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)
- General information for Coronavirus (COVID-19) in California <https://covid19.ca.gov/>
- Pertinent [FEMA guidance related to Project Roomkey](#).

What Can the State Do to Help?

The State is providing technical assistance to local communities, in coordination with local emergency operations centers, tribes, county social services agencies, cities and homeless Continuums of Care, to help communities establish occupancy agreements with local property owners to secure emergency housing to keep people experiencing homelessness safe from COVID-19. This includes offering template legal agreements which reflect FEMA requirements, examples and resource documents related to services necessary for immediate onsite operation, and consulting regarding questions about onsite operations, potential resources, and fiscal matters.

Mission Requests

Pursuant to the State's emergency response system, local Emergency Management Agencies can assist communities with coordinating emergency response efforts. When communities determine that local resources have been fully committed, they may request assistance from the State. **Requests to the State for supplies to respond to an emergency should be mission-tasked** through the existing emergency management resource request process. This process is important to ensure coordination at the local level and alignment of resources with need. **Also pursuant to a mission-task request**, the State can negotiate occupancy agreements with property owners, and/or help connect or negotiate with providers of essential operation services such as feeding, janitorial, security, and transportation, as applicable and necessary, which county and tribal governments then can execute.

Fiscal Matters

Protecting people experiencing homelessness from COVID-19 is an allowable and priority use of the \$100 million investment mentioned above, and also of the Homeless Emergency Assistance Program (HEAP) and Homeless Housing and Assistance and Prevention Program (HHAP) and other sources of funding, including anticipated FEMA reimbursements. Local and tribal governments should follow FEMA guidance for procurement, documentation, expenditures, and claiming related to this effort. **It is important to note that if a county or tribe is using local fund sources for the purposes of Project Roomkey it is NOT necessary to submit a mission task request through the existing emergency management resource request system.**

Once a community determines local resources and funding to support emergency housing for immediate protection efforts for people experiencing homelessness, including the \$100 million administered by the BCSH Agency identified above, have been fully obligated, the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) can utilize the \$50 million investment to further support counties and tribes. Requests of CDSS for this funding assistance will be coordinated through the CDSS Housing and Homelessness Branch, through requests submitted to housing@dss.ca.gov. Questions related to the use of CDSS funding also should be addressed to CDSS at housing@dss.ca.gov. Questions about the emergency management request process should be addressed to your local emergency manager. Questions related to the use of HEAP, HHAP and emergency funds awarded by the Business Consumer Services and Housing Agency outlined above should be directed to HCFC@bcsh.ca.gov.