



NEWS RELEASE

COVID-19 RESPONSE

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Homeless sheltering effort to protect all county residents gets underway



The County's efforts to protect the community from the spread of novel coronavirus by temporarily sheltering the homeless population are underway with the arrival of 20 state-funded trailers at Glen Helen Regional Park in Devore and the placement of 26 people in a hotel in San Bernardino.

Agreements are in the works with lodging facilities in other cities within the county to house additional homeless individuals and families. The county is exploring other options as well to ensure homeless people who are elderly and who have underlying health conditions, as well as those who are or are suspected of being COVID-19-positive, are sheltered during the crisis.

"This sheltering effort is critical for not only protecting the health of homeless individuals or families but also for protecting the entire community from the spread of the novel coronavirus," said Board of Supervisors Chairman Curt Hagman. "That is why we are working closely with city and community leaders throughout our county to get these sites up and running. The county is leading the fight against COVID-19, but protecting our communities from this pandemic has to be a team effort involving all of our cities and residents."

There are more than 2,000 unsheltered homeless individuals living in San Bernardino County. There are approximately 300 homeless identified as extremely high risk by medical doctors due to their age and serious health conditions.

The County's goal is to secure at least 300 units throughout the county in multiple communities as quickly as possible to contain the spread of COVID-19 in the unsheltered community and the entire county population. Staff from the County Department of Behavioral Health and organizations that serve the homeless will make phone contact with each homeless individual daily. The county will provide security at each site 24 hours per day, seven days a week. The County, Inland Empire Health Plan, and Molina Healthcare will provide meal packages to all persons in placement.

"The County is maximizing our collective effort to fight this health crisis head-on, which demands the necessary and expedient action of sheltering the homeless in place to reduce the spread of the virus and protect everyone's safety," said Board of Supervisors Vice Chair Josie Gonzales.

"We must value the efforts and sacrifices of those who are sheltering at home, by using every means possible to ensure everyone is sheltered in place in order to abate the fast spread of COVID-19," added Supervisor Gonzales, who is also founder and chair of the San Bernardino County Interagency Council on Homelessness.

In response to Governor Newsom's Executive Order to protect public safety and the spread of COVID-19 among the state's most vulnerable populations, San Bernardino County will receive a portion of \$800 million in emergency funding to quickly implement creative temporary housing solutions to address the complex

public health challenge of protecting vulnerable homeless individuals and communities against exposure to COVID-19.

The Executive Order requires counties to protect public safety and reduce the spread of COVID-19 by providing vulnerable homeless people access to temporary housing, as recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). San Bernardino County partnered with federal, state, and local agencies to create a plan to provide extensive supportive services to homeless individuals during their 14-day stay.

“Although COVID-19 has forced everyone in our community to make difficult decisions, it has also provided us with an unprecedented opportunity to support people experiencing homelessness,” said San Bernardino County Chief Executive Officer Gary McBride. “Homeless individuals, who once declined the offer for immediate supportive housing, now, like the rest of us, desire protection against COVID-19 in the safety and comfort of a shelter’s four walls. Our hope is that through this crisis, some homeless individuals will recognize the county and the community’s commitment to end homelessness and seek extended services which lead to permanent housing, employment, wellness, and resiliency.”

Homeless individuals over the age of 65 and persons of any age who have underlying health conditions or are immunocompromised, will receive priority housing, followed by pregnant homeless women, and homeless people meeting this criteria who are exposed to the virus and require isolation, but are non-symptomatic.

Homeless people who meet the criteria are contacted by County staff including the Sheriff’s Homeless Outreach and Proactive Enforcement team and Behavioral Health’s Homeless Outreach Support team. Homeless people requiring extensive healthcare services or hospitalization are directed to medical facilities, while others are offered the temporary housing on a voluntary, but conditional basis. Individuals who decline are reminded of social distancing requirements and provided referrals to other resources and services.

Homeless people who desire temporary housing sign an admission agreement, which includes a pledge for no visitors, abstinence from alcohol and substance use, vacating upon the ending of the 14-day stay period or rescinding of the Governor’s Executive Order, and participating in regular meetings with a case manager to develop a plan for immediate and subsequent housing needs. In addition to shelter, food, physical and behavioral health care, laundry facilities, and other resources are provided.

Temporary housing locations approved by the State of California include hotels, motels, trailers, shelters and other areas that allow the ability to practice social distancing and handwashing. Various San Bernardino County agencies, homeless service providers, business owners, cities, and communities are working in collaboration to determine which locations best allow for access to needed services while meeting strict CDC requirements for public safety.

Part of this solution are the 20 trailers that arrived at Glen Helen Regional Park. Each trailer can house one person or a family of two. Occupants will sign agreements requiring them to remain on the park grounds for the duration of the emergency.

For information about the coronavirus crisis, visit the County’s coronavirus website at [sbcounty.gov/covid19.com](https://sbcounty.gov/covid19). New information and resources are updated daily. The public can also contact the coronavirus public information line from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday at (909) 387-3911, or email the County at coronavirus@dph.sbcounty.gov.