

## MEMORANDUM

**Date:** December 7, 2020

**To:** Marisa A. Zapata, PhD  
Director, PSU-HRAC

**From:** Lauren E. M. Everett  
Graduate Research Assistant, PSU-HRAC

**Subject:** Updates on COVID-19 response, housing, and people experiencing homelessness nationwide, November 30 - December 6.

### News

1. Despite the [CDC's eviction moratorium](#), renter households all across the country are losing their homes. Meanwhile [a number of protections](#), including the moratorium, are set to expire this month.
2. In the latest development surrounding the contentious case of the city-ordered relocation of the residents of the The Lucerne Hotel in [New York City](#), a lawyer representing some of the men is filing an appeal. Last week a judge had ruled that the relocation of 240 hotel residents to another hotel miles away could move forward. [City elected officials respond](#) to the judge's ruling. Meanwhile, a [hotel conversion project in Brooklyn](#) is a promising model for creating much-needed housing that serves the houseless community.
3. [California's Project Homekey](#) represents an opportunity to make substantial progress on creating housing for people experiencing homelessness, which may be seen as a silver lining of the pandemic. The \$600 million initiative aims to acquire more than 90 properties, with 6,100 residences.
4. [Australia](#) is dealing with similar issues as the United States around government funding for hotel programs running out soon. In Victoria over 2,000 houseless people were offered hotel rooms as part of a program that was supposed to last until April, but now it appears that there isn't enough funding to continue housing all participants.
5. [San Francisco](#) had originally planned to close seven hotels where about 500 houseless people are living by December 21, but is now extending the program after receiving \$10 million in state assistance.
6. A new report finds that [one in four homeless children](#) are no longer enrolled in school.
7. In [Los Angeles](#), another wave of 'reclaimers' living in vacant houses owned by the California Department of Transportation were forcibly removed by officers right before Thanksgiving. These families included children as young as 3 months, and seniors over 70 who had been unsheltered. In total 62 people were arrested; 21 for occupying the properties, and 41 for unlawful assembly and blocking officers.
8. Outreach workers and advocates in [Washington](#) are rushing to spend federal dollars that expire at the end of the year, to place people living in encampments in hotels.

9. More Americans have been [paying rent on credit cards](#) than ever before, with an increase in as much as 70% from this time last year.
10. Fifty-five shelter guests at [San Diego](#)'s Convention Center tested positive for COVID, which was discovered through routine testing .

## National Low-Income Housing Coalition (NLIHC) weekly call and updates (November 30)

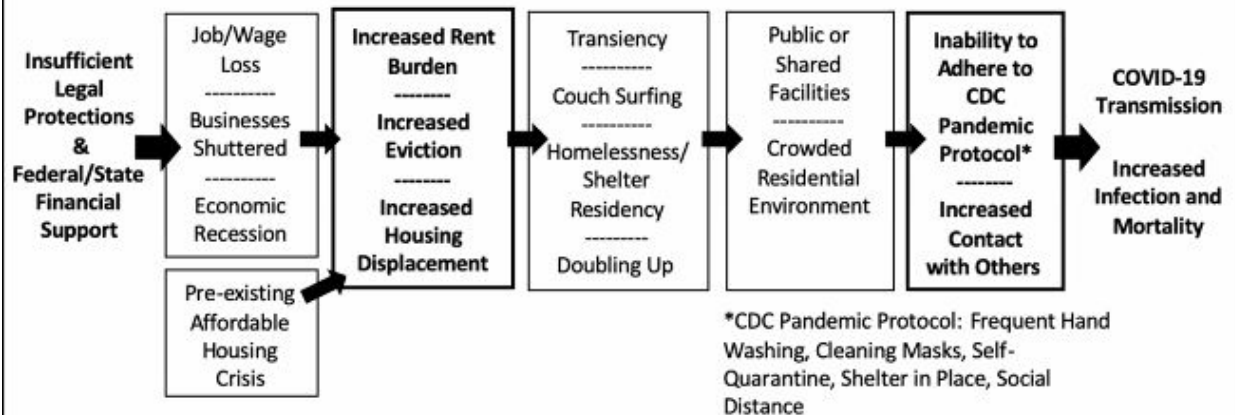
**Emily Benfer, Visiting Professor of Law, Wake Forest University; Kate Leifheit, Johns Hopkins University:**

**Emily:** The first study is on comparing COVID cases per population in states that have lifted their moratoriums over time. In the second, we examine the relationship among eviction, health outcomes, and especially for people of color

**Kate:** 27 of the states that had moratoriums lifted them during the study period. Originally over 40 states had moratoriums, which started in mid-March. The median stop date was May 31. We controlled for a number of factors including stay-at-home orders and school closures. Increases in mortality and in cases were correlated significantly with lifting the moratoriums. Sixteen weeks or more after lifting, the rate was 5.4 times higher than in places with moratoriums. The effects were stronger in states with weaker moratoriums. Lifting moratoriums may be associated with an excess of 433,700 cases by July. Examples: In Iowa the moratorium was lifted May 27, and we estimate 19,360 excess cases and 354 excess deaths; in Idaho the moratorium was lifted April 30, and we estimate 9,730 excess cases and 157 excess deaths. We saw the largest increase in Texas because it's a large state and lifted its moratorium early on in May.

**Emily:** Why does eviction increase the risk? Without legal protections and federal and state financial protections in place, combined with the existing housing crisis, tenants were placed under severe financial stress. Eviction risk results in doubling up, which means households with more people and a much greater risk of transmission. When sleeping outdoors or in a car, individuals have to use public facilities which is the opposite of the CDC's advice about social distancing. Housing precarity also creates stress and depression, which decreases the immune system's effectiveness.

## Eviction Increases the Risk of COVID-19 Acquisition and Transmission



In Study 2 we looked at historic trends and recent data that shows people of color are more likely to be evicted and to contract COVID. Black households are two times as likely to face eviction, with Black women evicted at the highest rates. Black and Latino people are over four times more likely to be hospitalized than Whites, and the death rates are also higher. The harms of eviction will not disappear once the pandemic ends. It has long-term effects on both health and on housing prospects. We conclude that eviction prevention is a necessary component of COVID mitigation strategies. Robust eviction moratoriums that freeze all phases of the process are crucial. Supportive measures like rental assistance, right to counsel, eviction diversion, utility support, and health care access are recommended. The pandemic has magnified the connection between housing and health.

**Q:** How do you control for other factors?

**A:** We account for that in our statistical model by including an indicator of where we are in time relative to stay-at-home orders, mask mandates, etc. We also include fixed effects such as for the week of the year to show how the pandemic is evolving over time. We also include features for the politics of the state, and bars/restaurants opening and closing. It's hard to control for every single thing.

**Q:** You don't make reference to the CARES Act moratorium, but is that just because it applies to all states?

**A:** Yes exactly. There are other papers that look at that, but because it applies to all states we couldn't have included it in our analysis.

**Q:** What do you think will happen when the CDC moratorium is lifted?

**A:** The study is not forward looking but there are researchers who are attempting to model what it might look like when it's lifted. If the current research is any indication, it will be catastrophic and we will be hard pressed to recover from it

**Q:** Why is the point in the eviction process that each moratorium targets important?

**A:** In a state that was only blocking the enforcement of an eviction, it means that as soon as it expires people will be forced from their housing. On the other hand in places where it blocks the entire process there is much more time.

[Expiring Eviction Moratoriums and COVID-19 Incidence and Mortality](#)

[Pandemic Housing Policy: Examining the Relationship Among Eviction, Housing Instability, Health Inequity, and COVID-19 Transmission](#)

**Andrew Settner, The Century Foundation:** The Century Foundation has developed [a dashboard of unemployment insurance by state](#). The basic unemployment benefit package is for up to 26 weeks. When you exhaust that there are PEUC benefits for 13 weeks, and then when those are exhausted up to 13-20 weeks of benefits. If one is ineligible for benefits (gig workers for example), they can apply for PUA benefits. On Dec 26, 12 million workers will be cut off from Unemployment Insurance benefits. That's 7.3 million from PUA and 4.6 million from PEUC. Emergency benefits have never been cut off this early in a cycle, in a crisis situation. It's been found that continuing to get benefits cuts the likelihood of homelessness in half. The nature of this pandemic has really changed how we think of the importance of these benefits. The sectors most hard hit by layoffs are the service industry and other relatively low-paid jobs that are disproportionately occupied by people of color.

Seventeen states and DC will be triggered onto the extended benefits program, which is a permanent program that comes online when the unemployment level is high. That will be about 2.9 million of those 12 million workers, who will still have some form of benefits in January, but the benefits also have to be paid 50% by the states. By December 26, 4.4 million workers will exhaust PEUC and PUA, and 1.5 million people have already exhausted it. There is also state level data in the report, with an interactive map that you can click on to show how many people are currently on benefits and when they will expire. Looking forward, there's a hope for the inclusion of some extension in the end of the year budget deal. There have been some bipartisan talks this weekend and momentum building in this difficult fight. We would also like to renew additional federal benefits (e.g. the \$600 a week that expired in July). Target states that need benefit renewal are Alaska, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Maine, Missouri, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Utah, West Virginia and Wisconsin.

**Q:** What are you hearing in terms of Republicans supporting an extension?

**A:** Sympathetic is a strong word, but I think there's beginning to be some recognition that we can't afford to not extend these benefits. Senators Romney and Collins have been part of that conversation, but we really had hoped we'd be further along in the negotiations.

**Bill Faith, Coalition on Homelessness and Housing in Ohio:** Back in the spring when the pandemic started our focus was really on serving the houseless population. The state has 300 emergency shelters which serve 10,000 people a day, but they had no readiness for this or idea of how to deal with it. We stepped up and did a lot of that work - hosted webinars and trainings. At first the staff had no PPE, the shelters were crowded, etc. so we played a role in procuring and distributing those supplies. Shelters often overuse volunteers for many of their staffing, and many volunteers were seniors who were either asked not to volunteer or decided not to, so we really had to rally to find extra funding to hire people. We raised about \$1.9 million and made many grants to groups around the state during the gap between the pandemic's beginning and when government funds were available. We advocated on multiple fronts for funding, which included \$5 million to Ohio's 9 CoCs for homelessness prevention, rapid rehousing, and emergency rental assistance. We've had challenges trying to get landlords to participate in some of these programs.

When it comes to emergency rental assistance, I have to give a shout out to all of our local housing advocates across the states who rallied to find any available funding they could. They used CDBG, CSBG, PRC, CARES Act, other government sources, and philanthropic dollars. Even so, demand is outpacing available resources. We began to target our governor for allocating rental assistance funding. The state received \$4.3 billion in federal pandemic funds, so we got 182 organizations to sign on to a letter urging the governor to spend \$100 million on rent assistance. In October the governor announced the Home Relief Grant Program in the amount of \$55 million, which covers rent, mortgage and some utilities. In November the state announced \$55.8 million in CDBG-CV to continue Home Relief Grants into 2021. These funds are going out at such a pace that unless we get a large federal spending package we are going to be looking at a lot of evictions.

**Francisca Blanc, Utah Housing Coalition:** We run a statewide information and referral hotline. Utility and rental assistance have been the highest priorities for our callers by far. The governor issued an eviction moratorium from April 1 through March of 2021. Looking at a graph of eviction levels over the year, it dips down in April and then back up sharply in August when the CARES moratorium ended, then back down when the CDC moratorium started. Since the CDC moratorium we've been meeting every week to discuss the situation. In addition to the usual rent relief sources in the CARES Act, we also used discretionary funds. The strategy was to spend the funding from HUD, and then the \$20 million in discretionary funds. The \$4 million or so in HUD funds was spent by mid-August. The funding requirements are very flexible. Eligibility is 100% AMI, with a maximum of \$2,000 per household. As of today we have allocated all of these funds. We have one free mediation service. In total she received 844 mediation calls, and of those about 286 were actual mediation cases, and she was able to help around 200 households stay in their homes. Utah received \$935 million in emergency funding through the CARES Act, and still has more than \$307 million that needs to be spent.

**Elaine Morales, Harris County Housing Stability Task Force (Houston):** The Task Force was created by local pandemic recovery leaders with the purpose of addressing the effects of the rental housing crisis as a result of the pandemic. We're trying to look at the housing instability cycle as not limited to the eviction phase, but look at what happens before things get to that point. We began our work in July 2020 and have focused on addressing urgent issues, including the local response, and recommending interventions. Harris County has seen 16,015 evictions filed since March 15th, 2020, with 2,524 cases on the docket. Only about 3.9% of defendants had legal representation. What we've seen is that tenants will pay their rent before they pay for other important expenses. One issue is that rent assistance will cover past payments but not current ones, and that needs to change. Some of the small landlords we talked to are now aware of the CDC moratorium. Landlords have shared that direct cash assistance to tenants is helpful, but more technical assistance during the application process is needed. We've prioritized three work streams: 1. Responding to immediate request from government leadership, 2. Launching work groups, and 3. Developing a shared knowledge base of task force members. We are expecting City Council to add \$12 million this week for rental assistance.

**Q:** Can you speak about community engagement?

**A:** We have very diverse representation in the task force and are including other community members in these groups. We've engaged landlords and tenants directly through these focus groups.

### **Other resources:**

1. Some out-of-the-box solutions to [improve rental housing affordability](#) by students at the Harvard Graduate School of Design.
2. New research finds that [longtime homeowners in a predominantly Black Nashville neighborhood](#) sold their homes for much less than market value to predatory real estate professionals. This finding questions the premise that gentrification is intrinsically lucrative for long time homeowners.