

MEMORANDUM

Date: January 11, 2021

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, January 4 – 10.

News

1. The Point in Time Count (PIT) is conducted annually or biannually by regional homeless services Continuums of Care (CoCs), and is required in order to receive federal funding for homeless services. This year [Multnomah County](#), [San Francisco](#) and other localities are requesting waivers from this requirement due to concerns about COVID-19 transmission. Researchers at the University of Pennsylvania have developed [guidelines for conducting the PIT](#) during the pandemic.
2. In [Fresno, CA](#), the county's CoC is participating in a pilot project called Built for Zero, which focuses on prevention strategies to eliminate chronic homelessness and homelessness among veterans.
3. The U.S. Department of The Treasury released an overview of the recently approved [\\$25 billion in rental assistance](#).
4. A new study examines the link between [housing stability and heart health](#).
5. In [New York City](#), residents of the Lower East Side are suing the city over the siting of a hotel shelter for people experiencing homelessness. This is separate from [The Lucerne Hotel](#) lawsuit, on which a state appeals court ruled this week that the houseless men living at the hotel would be allowed to remain while the judges consider the case in more detail.
6. Advocates in [San Francisco](#) claim it is more difficult to place clients in hotel shelters than previously, despite the recent passage of a program extension.
7. In [Orange County, CA](#) the number of people who died while experiencing homelessness rose dramatically in 2020 to 330 deaths, from just over 200 the previous year.
8. In the midst of a COVID surge, [Los Angeles](#) shelters and service sites are overwhelmed

National Low-Income Housing Coalition (NLIHC) weekly call and updates (January 4)

Diane Yentel: Looking back on 2020, though it was obviously very challenging, we should also acknowledge the unprecedented achievements. The eviction moratorium is both not enough, and a

huge relief for those who need it. The new declarative statement was posted a few hours before New Years. I want to also thank and acknowledge all of you who responded to our urgent call to action when it looked like the president wasn't going to sign the COVID relief bill. The CDC has not responded to us or any journalists for comment. Now we have to get the word out to tenants that they are protected until the end of January, and we also have to pressure President Elect Biden to enact a longer moratorium on his first day in office. Many of you signed on the national letters we sent to the CDC and Congress urging for the extension. We are now adapting that letter and are going to reopen it for more signatures, and send it to President Elect Biden. We would love to add additional signatories beyond those who signed the last letter. Sign the letter [here](#).

The other major accomplishment is the [\\$25 billion in rental assistance](#). Of that \$400 million goes to US territories, \$800 million goes to tribal communities, and the rest goes to localities with populations of 200,000 or more. According to the allocation formula, 90% of the funds will be used for rent and utility assistance for up to 15 months. The remaining 10% can be used for case management and other stabilizing services. The funds can go directly to landlords, or if they refuse to participate, directly to tenants. The threshold for eligibility is below 80% AMI [Area Median Income], with 50% and below being the priority population. Tenants must show that they have income loss related to the pandemic, and that there is a homelessness risk. We have a new FAQ that incorporates questions from the last NLIHC call. Last time we had a document with the higher-level allocations, but we have a new document with more detail about the allocations and how we arrived at these numbers. The next step is that cities and other communities with populations over 200,000 will have to certify with the Department of Treasury. They haven't yet opened that process but we'll let you know. Once that's open it will probably take 3-4 weeks to certify and send the funds. We're also going to be tracking how these funds are utilized at the state and local level, as we have been throughout the pandemic. We're hiring, if anyone is interested in helping track these programs.

Another immediate next step is influencing the guidance that the Treasury will put out around this fund. There are a lot of unknowns here, mainly around the timing with this. In some ways the law is very clear around the usage of these funds, and communities who already have assistance funds up and running will have an easy time applying that framework. It will be more difficult for communities who don't already have programs. We are working under the assumption that the Treasury is going to start drafting guidance ASAP, and we want to influence that outcome. We have working groups that will be addressing that and we hope you will join those. They are the Policy Working Group and the State and Local Implementation Working Group.

Then the third most relevant provision of the new bill is an extension of the deadline to spend the previous CRF dollars to the end of 2021. Finally, while it wasn't in the 2021 package, there is a new FEMA policy to reimburse noncongregate shelter throughout the duration of the pandemic (versus the previous 30 day increment). Given this news, we hope many of you will utilize this, and will be talking about it in our weekly Working With FEMA Working Group calls. Visit our website to [sign up for these working groups](#). Thank you again for all of your work, and in advance for continuing your advocacy efforts.

Sharon McDonald, Senior Fellow for Families and Children, National Alliance to End Homelessness: My job here today is to alert you to [new resources on homelessness](#). I know many people on the call already understand the challenges families and children face with homelessness, and I hope these resources will help you direct funding. I hope it will help build the case to allocate ESG funds as well as deploying other resources like TANF. A key element is centering racial equity in allocating funds. The pandemic is exacerbating existing structural inequities. Black women and children are already disproportionately represented in homelessness and we have an obligation to make sure that doesn't increase. During the pandemic some children and families are living without any shelter. They are in urgent need of immediate connection to resources, and to a place to stay, ideally on their own. Children that used to be at school all day are now in shelter programs and expected to attend school all day in places that often don't have adequate resources. Parents that lost jobs also lost childcare, so this is setting families back and resulting in longer shelter stays. While homeless service programs have been gearing up to respond to the needs of families, there are extraordinary external pressures such as an increase in families experiencing homelessness just as shelters are reducing their capacity. Helping families escape homelessness means a number of resources including rental assistance, help in finding housing, and in negotiating with landlords. We also need tools to help people avoid homelessness. The majority of families who enter shelter are leaving a doubled-up situation, and often homelessness prevention programs are not open to people in those situations. With greater investments in staff, agencies can help divert families from entering shelter. We're hoping these tools will be useful for you as you allocate investments and build the case for programs with your jurisdiction.

Q: What recommendations are you making to the Biden administration around homelessness?

A: Each year states receive a large amount of funding for this, and I think a larger percentage should be allocated to families. We need an economic floor under families so when they lose a job they don't spiral into losing housing. As always, a priority is making the McKinney-Vento homelessness account as healthy as it can be, so those families who have fallen through the cracks always have support. We need more from the HHS partners and other system resources to decrease vulnerability.

Sue Watlov Phillips, ED, Metropolitan Interfaith Council on Affordable Housing: We are located in the St. Paul-Minneapolis Metro Area. In Minnesota, we started pushing our state homelessness agencies to look forward to how this pandemic was going to affect the houseless population. We got the state to start doing weekly provider calls, which included people with lived experience, service providers, and other stakeholders. In March, we were able to encourage the state to put \$330 million into addressing the COVID response and housing. That clearly wasn't enough, so over the past nine months we've put some of the CARES dollars into the effort as well. In regards to rental and mortgage assistance, it was clear we had at least 250,000 at risk of homelessness, so we started working with our state legislature to get \$100 million allocated from CARES funding. The majority of people served are at 200% of the poverty level, and had to be eligible due to unemployment, illness, or another COVID-related issue. We had this excellent

program we started in summer 2020, and over five months spent \$100 million to stabilize families. We made sure we were centering equity in recognizing certain groups who are overrepresented in the homeless population.

While the program was initially designed only for tenants, we also had counties that used some of their own dollars to enable landlords to also apply. I know some people are hesitant to pay landlords directly, but we've had positive outcomes with that. This program was set up quickly and was easily accessible through 211 and the website, as well as a text option to get the application. One takeaway is that we needed the input of people with lived experience, as there were a lot of folks who had struggles with technology and completing the application on their own. One of the things we learned is that having community mediation was really helpful in getting people through the application process. We need to be able to support people with learning disabilities, people who aren't computer literate, and who experience other barriers to completing the application.

Martie North, President, Arkansas Coalition of Housing and Neighborhood Growth for Empowerment: We are a statewide affordable housing nonprofit coalition. We've been making change in Arkansas since 2005. The pandemic has presented us with a lot of challenges but some wonderful opportunities as well. We decided to focus heavily on two of our policy priorities, which include creating comprehensive housing surveys and supporting other organizations that are working on improving habitability standards and tenant protections. We have been working with our partners across the state to identify the highest needs in housing, and then using that information to create a survey for political candidates around their positions on these issues. The results are made public, and will help us identify who our affordable housing champions would be. The state of Arkansas does not have a committee or other entity focused on housing. The second priority is working with organizations who are focusing on habitability and tenant protections. They are collecting as much data as possible about evictions in the state and other information to inform bills. The state legislature allocated \$100 million for rental assistance, but a significant amount of landlords refuse to take the assistance and are suing the state. We are on track to match the same amount of eviction filings as this time last year. Because the state does not have a standard electronic format to collect data, the information about eviction filings are likely higher than what we identified. The filings we did identify are tied to non-payment of rent. There is a tremendous need for more funding, and to work on our eviction statutes, habitability issues, and landlord-tenant law.

Q: Why are the landlords refusing to accept the funds?

A: You have individuals who don't really understand the moratorium and feel like it's government intervention. Then there are individuals who just feel like they can get another tenant, because once again we have horrific laws here that allow quick evictions. We also have many "self-help" evictions, which is when the landlord illegally evicts a tenant and leaves their belongings out on the sidewalk.

Shelly Nortz, Deputy Executive Director for Policy, Coalition for the Homeless (New York): We got great news at the state level over the holidays, when the eviction moratorium was extended

through May 1. This includes a moratorium on residential evictions, foreclosures, suspension of tax lien sales, and some related matters relating to credit reporting. The state's reliance on the moratorium has paid dividends. The census on family shelters had fallen, but the single shelters have increased significantly, mainly because many of these individuals have lost informal housing arrangements, so the moratorium doesn't protect them. People who have lost their jobs also lost their weekly rentals. Rental assistance has not been such a positive thing in New York. The majority of the \$100 million set aside for that did not get spent. Some structural problems were fixed in how the state was determining eligibility. For example there was a requirement that people were already rent burdened, but many needing assistance weren't.

We were strong supporters of the \$100 billion in federal aid. We anticipate almost one million households will need assistance for some period of time. The formulas for the federal money are worrisome in that not enough will go to the cities. We still have 5,000 people in NYC alone in congregate shelters. We know the mortality rates for people in these shelters is over 70% higher than for other New Yorkers. We're working to make sure people get vaccines. For many people COVID-19 is causing chronic illness and disability, and that's something that's going to be important for our clients. There's a working group in New York that is addressing the long term implications of this and an equity agenda, as Black and Latino communities are suffering much higher death rates. In the interest of saving lives we continue to litigate these issues. One suit is against the city, which is moving people out of hotels and back into shelters. Legal Aid is representing us, and making oral arguments this week. This is critical because 80% of houseless people are sleeping in shelters throughout the state. The other issue is providing internet access in shelters, so children can do distance learning, and that suit is against the city as well.

Other resources:

1. The Federal Housing Administration (FHA) announced it is [extending the foreclosure moratorium](#) for single family FHA-insured mortgages through February 28, 2021.
2. The NLIHC's guide to the National [Federal Eviction Moratorium](#).
3. The Urban Institute and the Urban-Greater DC Initiative are hosting a virtual discussion about strategies for promoting housing stability during the economic crisis on January 27. [Register here](#).
4. The NLIHC's [Ending Homelessness: A Virtual Conference](#) will take place March 8 – 10.
5. The CDC will host a webinar on [vaccination for people experiencing homelessness](#) on January 19.