

MEMORANDUM

Date: March 29, 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, March 22 - 28.

News

1. The Biden Administration announced that the [CDC eviction moratorium](#) will be extended through June 30, 2021. Additionally, the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) will work to increase awareness of the moratorium's protections, and will work alongside the Federal Trade Commission to enforce penalties against landlords who violate the order.
2. How the [American Rescue Plan](#) has the potential to make a significant impact on the looming eviction crisis.
3. In [Los Angeles](#), the police sweep of a large encampment in Echo Park was met with large protests.
4. In [Portland, OR](#) an organization called Hygiene4All brings housed and unhoused residents together to meet the basic needs of people experiencing homelessness. The pilot site under the Morrison Bridge includes portable toilets, a shower, and space to relax. This spring they will begin distributing clothing and bedding.
5. *Shelterforce* explores the history of [HUD's tenant organizing fund](#) (514 funding) and why it has barely been used in two decades, with the hope that the Biden administration will reactivate it.
6. [Pima, AZ](#) has allocated \$2 million in federal funds for legal counsel to tenants facing eviction. The county will do proactive outreach to households who have court cases on the docket.
7. Despite \$300 million in federal rental assistance, some tenants in [Kentucky](#) are having evictions filed against them as their landlords refuse to accept the payments. Though federal guidelines allow tenants to apply for and accept funds directly, the state requires landlord cooperation, and some landlords are hesitant to share their business records with program administrators.
8. HUD's 2020 Annual [Homeless Assessment Report to Congress](#) has been released, and reveals that homelessness nationwide has increased for the fourth year in a row, by 2% between 2019 and 2020.
9. In [San Francisco](#) a new office has been created to place residents of shelter-in-place hotels in permanent housing.
10. [Texas](#) legislators have introduced two bills to give communities more control over the siting of facilities for people experiencing homelessness.

Urban Institute webinar: Promoting Equitable COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution in the D.C. Region (March 23)

[Speaker biographies](#)

Monique King-Viehlend, Director of State & Local Housing Policy, Urban Institute: Pacific Islanders, Latino, and Black and Indigenous Americans have a COVID rate of twice as many as White and Asian. 15% of COVID deaths are Black Americans, and life expectancy has decreased by 2.1 years, which is more than twice that of White Americans. Looking at the Black population in D.C. - which is 45% of the populations - it accounts for 76% of deaths. The pandemic has laid bare the full impact of systemic racism. I've followed this issue closely, both personally and professionally. Our panelists will provide an overview of vaccine efforts in the regions, and how the region can adopt an equitable approach.

Q: I've shared some insights about the impact of the pandemic on BIPOC communities in the D.C. area, but can you share your thoughts?

Jenny Haley, Research Associate, Urban Institute Health Policy Center: The pandemic has laid bare inequities, which we see in the impacts you mention. One thing we see is overrepresentation with different occupations, multi-generational households, and different health disparities. These disparities are often also related to poverty and structural racism, so it's important that we focus our vaccine efforts on these populations. We're still seeing inequities in lack of internet access and transportation. We need better data as well. For example in D.C. a lot of the vaccinations are going to people who live in the adjacent states and we don't know that impact that's having on the D.C. population. We don't have race and ethnicity data for most vaccinations either.

Q: As someone who leads an organization, can you tell us what you're seeing?

George Jones, Chief Executive Officer, Bread for the City, DC: Back in January we started to get access to the vaccine. We saw a disproportionate number of white residents come to our clinic, which is surprising because we don't have any white patients. We realized this was a common trend nationwide. The good news is that the District responded quickly to that trend and we were able to get out of that internet portal and reach out to our community. Now 70-80% of the folks who show up are Black and Brown people. So you have to be intentional and anticipate an inequitable outcome if things are left to their own devices.

Q: Does the situation in D.C. mirror what you're seeing in Virginia and Maryland?

Travis Gayles, Health Officer/Chief of Public Health Services, Montgomery County, Maryland: The demographics we've seen with fatalities and early vaccinations does mirror other areas. Montgomery County is a microcosm of all of those things Jenny mentioned - a lack of affordable housing leading to multigenerational homes, essential workers, etc. We created an equity framework early on in the distribution to make sure it was reaching the communities who were hit

the hardest. One of the other things we've continued to promote is education and outreach. Simply putting the site in the communities isn't enough.

Q: From your perspective, what does the data indicate about vaccine hesitancy?

Haley: There was a survey that found a greater level of hesitancy among Black and Republican respondents. In the urban survey the most common concerns were about side effects. Black Americans have very legitimate concerns stemming from our country's abuse in the medical research field and resulting mistrust in the healthcare system. However a lot of what we describe as vaccine hesitancy seems to be rooted in a need for more information with no way to address those concerns. Another issue is access to the vaccination site, due to a lack of transportation, being able to get off of work, not being able to sign up online, or knowing how to find the sign up within a complex online system.

Q: Can you tell us a little more about the efforts your organization has been involved with?

Jones: It's important to note that the issue isn't so much hesitancy as that there isn't enough vaccine for everyone who wants it. That creates a situation where you're choosing who's deserving and who's not. There's also a lot of misinformation, particularly in the Black community, about the vaccine. We figured out that you have to be able to talk to your community members about the risks and benefits. We got people saying yes to the vaccine pretty quickly when we did the outreach, and especially when I got the shot, that was reassuring to people I talked to. The other thing that is really important to say is that the pandemic is a symptom, the disparities in the vaccine is a symptom, the death rates, of systemic inequities. We have to have a recommitment to fighting extreme income inequality and poverty, because those are the things that make our community vulnerable. We need to recommit to fighting poverty and socioeconomic disparities, because another crisis will happen at some point. If we haven't addressed this we're going to see these disparities play out again and again.

Q: What do you think is driving the low vaccination rates among BIPOC?

Gayles: The disparities we're seeing here are not new, as others have said. It's incumbent upon us to come up with the comprehensive strategies to address these issues. Social support is a really important component. As it relates to an equity framework for vaccine distribution let me say that the statement by the governor is not accurate. Having a one-time clinic at a church is not enough, because we know our communities use different spaces. So the notion of hesitancy being the sole reason people aren't being vaccinated is not correct. A recent poll showed the highest percentage of vaccination hesitant people in Maryland are White republican men. So addressing the physical barriers AND those social supports are important. Recently we've been doing home-bound visits for people who have barriers getting to the sites. We've also been trying to identify high-volume spaces like large multi-family buildings with vulnerable populations. Working with employers is another strategy, to make sure their employees are able to get vaccinated and get the time off that they need. We've been looking at data by zip code on hospitalizations, deaths, positive cases etc., to target outreach.

Q: Would interpretation services and the use of AI translations technology help with building trust?

Haley: I think that's key. We've talked several times here about moving away from online sign up and to telephone or in-person sign up, like going door-to-door. That's a place where translation services would be really helpful.

Jones: We're trying to partner with the D.C. government and other sources to increase language access, especially Asian immigrants living in a certain corridor of the city. That is a part of equitable solutions.

Q: How can community based organizations best partner with local governments?

Gayles: The first step is leveraging your footprint in the community. We as the health department may not be the best messenger for this outreach, so if you can figure out what the biggest barriers are in the community you serve that's really helpful. I think we missed an opportunity to ask people what their concerns are and tailor our messaging to that. The second way that health departments can partner is to utilize the existing network of clinical volunteers, social services, etc. If we're partnering with an organization, they already have a whole network of providers for other issues people may be experiencing like housing instability, so the vaccine appointment could also be an opportunity to do outreach for these issues.

NLIHC Welcome and Introduction to the HoUSed Campaign for Universal, Stable & Affordable Housing (March 23)

[Campaign overview](#)

Sign on to [the NLIHC's letter](#) urging Congress to increase funding for housing and homelessness by April 1

Diane Yentel: This is the moment we've been waiting for, and we're ready. We have a dedicated network of advocates, a president who has called for major investment in housing, and Democrats in Congress who are ready to go big and bold, and we've built bipartisan support for some of our proposals as well. We will build on this moment together, through our new campaign. The solutions are not only major investments but also anti-racist interventions into our inequitable by design housing system. We already have strong champions for these solutions on Capital Hill, and none are more committed than Maxine Waters.

Representative Maxine Waters, California: To all the members of the coalition, I'd like to convey how appreciative I am for your work, and also to the President for providing leadership. With the passage of the American Rescue Plan, help is on the way. It includes essential funding for emergency rental assistance, combined with the rental assistance funding from previous bills, and the new funding for housing vouchers, this bill is truly historic. I am confident that the CDC will extend the eviction moratorium. In the meantime, we have to make sure that grantees are effectively administering the funds and programs. I am thankful for all of the service providers who are running shelters and other services for people experiencing homelessness. The funding we've provided will be critical for helping our neighbors achieve housing stability. I will be working to

make sure these funds are distributed equitably, and am committed to making sure housing is a critical part of any infrastructure package. With the Biden administration, I am confident that we will be able to prioritize housing in our infrastructure going forward. We had a hearing with the Fed Director and the Treasury, and I took that opportunity to speak with Janet Yellen about the guidelines for rental assistance and my concerns. The average renter probably doesn't understand the details of the moratoriums they are protected by. In California, the guidelines that are being used will not allow them to do 100% rental assistance and that it's 80% instead, and that causes me some concern. I am arranging a call with Governor Newsom today to talk about what was passed and what may be problematic. The implementation and flexibility the states have may present problems and opportunities for landlords to be evicting people. I'll be working to make sure this rental assistance is distributed and that program implementation is effective.

Q: Can you talk a little more about your [Housing is Infrastructure Act](#)?

Waters: It is legislation that gives us an opportunity to deal with not only the impacts of COVID, but the challenges we've faced for so long in providing safe and affordable housing. Some of the things it would provide are the costs for capital improvements in public housing. Many of our public housing is in disrepair. I'm also keen on the development of affordable housing, which means the Housing Trust Fund has to be funded in such a way that affordable housing developers are best able to provide this housing. We also need to know what barriers developers face that add costs on and result in this housing not being as affordable as it needs to be, such as permits and other city costs. We also have some things in the bill for homeownership. I'm really thinking about how to help people afford downpayments, which is a real obstacle for many.

Mindy Woods, Steering committee member, Resident Action Project and board member,

NLIHC: I'm a single mom and someone who has experienced homelessness twice in the last ten years. That led me to the Resident Action Project, which is based in Washington state. We do storytelling and civic action, and my initial introduction into advocacy was to go to our state capital and share my story and what a particular bill meant for myself and my son. We've organized across the state to meet with politicians on the housing and homelessness crisis, which has exploded with the pandemic. I have been fortunate enough to have secured a job right as the pandemic began. As soon as I started, I was handed a list of people who need rental assistance with city funds (Seattle). Drawing from my personal experience, I hit the ground running, and that speaks to the massive crisis we have on our hands. We then secured CARES funding. This opened my eyes to how many people are one crisis away from losing their housing. Washington state is about to get our next round of CARES funding, and I've been bombarded with phone calls asking when this will be available. This speaks to the importance of a robust housing system, with permanent supportive housing and other resources.

Will Fischer, Senior Director for Housing Policy & Research, Center for Budget and Policy

Priorities: The expansion of the housing assistance voucher program is the single most important part of this campaign, in our view. We have an unprecedented opportunity to expand the program to meet the needs of low-income households. Vouchers have a cascading effect in other parts of participants' lives, such as changing school less often and reduced behavioral issues. They expand

housing choices for people with disabilities and seniors. Because people who struggle to afford housing are disproportionately people of color, vouchers are a really important tool for addressing racial inequity. The program is not perfect and there are ways that it could be improved, but the biggest limitation is that there isn't enough funding for everyone who needs one. Funding is by appropriation not entitlement (*versus food benefits for example), and is never enough to serve everyone who's eligible. We think that should be the goal. A recent study by Columbia University found that expanding the program would lift 9.3 million people out of poverty. It's important to emphasize how different this year would have been if we already had a universal voucher program.

Seth Embry, Policy Analyst, Public Housing Authorities Directors Association: We're an organization in DC that represents housing authorities across the country, in both urban and rural settings. Public housing is a resource and we have a moral obligation to invest in it. Over 2 million Americans live in this housing, and the government has not been keeping up with maintenance and upkeep so the quality of the structures is deteriorating. Capital investments will stimulate local economies, increase environmental sustainability of the housing, improve quality of life for residents, and have other benefits. The amount needed to address annual needs is about \$1.4 billion, and federal investment is less than that. There have been some modest increases, but investments are where they were about 18 years ago. For each one million dollars spent, 24 jobs are created. Weatherization and other sustainability measures will help residents withstand climate change. There are a host of legislative efforts we support, including a bill to eliminate the Faircloth Amendment, which limits the amount of federally funded housing.

Yentel: We are pushing for [universal housing vouchers](#) in our campaign, and for reforms like source of income discrimination protection and small area Fair Market Rents. We are going to push for at least \$40 billion a year for the Affordable Housing Trust Fund, to expand our affordable housing supply.

Donald Whitehead, ED, National Coalition for the Homeless: Last week we learned that HUD released their [AHAR report](#) (?), and the number of homeless people in this country increased in 2020. We've now seen an increase for four consecutive years. This was due to an increase of sheltered and chronic homelessness. There was static growth in the number of veterans, families grew, and we saw a decrease in youth homelessness. The number of unsheltered homeless outnumbered people in shelter. We also saw the percentage of Black and indigenous people increase. This crisis began in the late 70s and early 80s, and has continued and increased. There's a shortage of 7 million affordable homes for extremely low-income households. Sustained programs that are targeted to meet the needs of the lowest income Americans are essential. The Affordable Housing Trust Fund (HTF) is a crucial piece of this effort. The HoUsed Campaign aims to secure a dedicated funding source for this. We also need to create ownership opportunities. Because the HTF is funded outside the appropriations process it has no cost to the federal government, and it allows for local control in the development and management of this housing.

Nan Roman, President & CEO, National Alliance to End Homelessness: Housing instability is often the beginning of a downward spiral that leads to homelessness, which has impacts on many

aspects of life. Sometimes it's something as small as a bag of groceries that is the tipping point to losing one's home. The cost of shelter is much more expensive than the resources needed to avoid this outcome. Unfortunately smaller amounts of this funding are harder to come by. That's why I'm excited by the housing stabilization part of this campaign. The eviction prevention bill has bipartisan support, and will reduce both evictions and homelessness. It's the missing piece to ensure that all Americans are stably housed.

Representative Ritchie Torres, 15th District of New York: Affordable housing is the reason I ran for city council and then congress, so it's my *raison d'être*. I want to thank the coalition for this work. None of us can survive and thrive without a home, so I look forward to advancing the cause of affordable housing. I would not be where I am today without public housing. The one constant in my life was a stable, affordable home. We know that the solution to homelessness is housing, and we have the wealth and ability to make the right to housing a reality, but we've lacked the will. Right now we are living in the midst of an FDR moment, and we have the opportunity to create, and perverse, and green affordable housing on a level we never have before. We need vouchers for all so that no family in need pays more than 30% of their income for rent. We also need to increase supply and confront affordable housing, and we need to protect tenants from harassment and arbitrary eviction. As policymakers we have the benefit of an FDR moment and must act on it.

Dianne Enriquez, Opportunity Campaign Director, Center for Popular Democracy: We are a network of grassroots organizations that are multi-issue. We have about 53 affiliates total. We've been working on housing for a number of years. About 23 million renter households have lost employment income during the pandemic, and many owe back rent. We are working to end source of income discrimination, put in place anti-rent gouging policies, establish and fund a national right to counsel, and enact just cause eviction protections. We believe that universal tenant protection will keep those 40 million tenants estimated to be at risk of evictions in their homes.

Other resources:

1. Key takeaways from [Ending Homelessness: A Virtual Conference](#) (March 8 - 10).
2. Urban Institute's policy brief, [Federal Reforms to Strengthen Housing Stability, Affordability, and Choice](#).