

MEMORANDUM

Date: March 15, 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 8 - 14.

News

1. Monday the Senate passed the [American Rescue Plan Act](#), which will allocate nearly \$50 billion to address housing and homelessness issues. President Biden signed it into law on Friday.
2. Another U.S. District Judge ruled that the CDC overstepped its authority with [the federal eviction moratorium](#). The Cleveland judge joins a Texas judge in a similar ruling last month. Neither of the judges ordered an injunction that would stop enforcement of the ban, but it does potentially create a legal precedent that could undermine the order in the future.
3. In Canada, [Ontario](#) will allocate \$255 million to municipalities and Indigenous communities to prevent COVID outbreaks in congregate homeless shelters. Mitigation strategies include the acquisition of motel and hotel rooms, hiring more shelter staff, and purchasing more PPE. Toronto will receive \$94.5 million of these funds, which adds to the over \$663 million the city is already spending to expand its shelter system and support unhoused residents.
4. Activists with Seize the Hotels in [Los Angeles](#) are calling on the city to take possession of every unoccupied hotel room, by using the FEMA reimbursement funds to lease them from owners. This action is proposed in response to the reluctance of some hotel owners to participate in the Project Roomkey program, combined with the program failing to serve the targeted number of participants. Instead, the city [continued to ramp down Project Roomkey](#), citing concerns about FEMA reimbursement timelines.
5. During the catastrophic winter storm in [Texas](#), volunteer mutual aid networks were a crucial part of the safety net for people experiencing homelessness in Austin.
6. In [Clark County, WA](#) (Vancouver area) the hotel and motel program had a positive impact on the lives of people experiencing homelessness. However the end of the program has thrown many participants back into houselessness and instability.
7. The NLIHC, the NYU Furman Center and the Housing Initiative at Penn recently released their new report, [Learning from Emergency Rental Assistance Programs: Lessons from Fifteen Case Studies](#). This new report is a guide for rental assistance program administrators to achieve racial equity goals and most effectively serve low-income households.

8. The [Connecticut](#) General Assembly is considering a bill that would establish a Right to Housing in the state.
9. The [Pittsburgh](#) City Council approved a citywide eviction moratorium that will remain until the local health emergency order is lifted. The ordinance covers both non-payment evictions if income loss is related to the pandemic, and refusal to renew lease agreements. A local landlord group is suing the city.
10. Legislators in [Washington](#) are working on a multi-pronged bill to protect tenants who have fallen behind on rent from eviction.
11. Eviction filings in [Florida](#) have reached pre-pandemic levels, creating an extensive backlog of cases that will result in thousands of evictions once the federal moratorium expires.

National Low-Income Housing Coalition (NLIHC) weekly call and updates (March 8)

Eileen Divringi, Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia: We recently released a [research brief](#) titled *Renters' Experiences During COVID*. The data is a survey that was conducted in the first few weeks of January 2021. We had a little over 900 respondents. We asked renters if they had missed any payments or made any partial payments. 8% had missed or made a partial payment or owe back rent; 16% have missed a payment or made a partial payment but do not owe back rent; and 76% have not missed or made a partial payment. One thing to note is that individuals who have a payment plan agreement might not see themselves as owing back rent, so there might be a phrasing issue in the question. Either way, we can see that 24% of renter households have been unable to make full payments at some point. When we break the data down by demographic category, Black and Latino renters are more likely than other households to have missed rent payments at some point. For renters who have missed or made a partial rent payment, 31% have a signed agreement, 52% have an informal agreement, and 17% have no agreement. This last point is important to highlight for advocates working in the legal aid sector. We also asked about eviction concerns. Nearly a quarter of renters are worried about eviction and close to 20% have already been warned about eviction.

As for accessing rental assistance programs, 89% have not applied and of those 57% have not applied because they were not sure how to. Of all respondents, only 3.5% have received assistance, 5% were waiting to hear, and 2.5% have been denied. The top methods of financial coping right now are stimulus payments (37%), cutting essential spending (18%), paying fewer bills (14%), and cutting discretionary spending (12%).

Q: How would you describe the outcomes here as similar or different to the Census PULSE Survey data?

A: The question phrasing really matters. Our estimates, if you think of our percent of renters who have missed payments or paid partial rent and owe back rent it might look small, but we also have the category of missed or partial payments but who do not owe back rent. That captures another

group of people who we would consider to be experiencing some level of housing insecurity. If you add the two you get 24% of renters, which is more in line with the PULSE Survey data.

Q: Of the 22% who say they do not know how to apply for assistance, is there any breakdown into who these people are?

A: Unfortunately we did not have the data to do any additional breakdowns.

Q: Did the survey go into how much was owed?

A: We did ask, and they reported around \$1,800 on average. That's on the lower end of estimates out there, and of course there are different methods for making that estimate. This also captures people who are behind on rent for other reasons. We do provide a little more detail in the brief.

Q: A couple of folks are asking how you selected participants?

A: It's a nationally representative survey from all over the country. As you typically do with survey data, we adjusted our analysis to make sure we were matching the national distribution by race and income.

Q: Was your question inclusive of all housing costs, not just rent?

A: No, just rent.

Q: Do you have any intentions of updating this data, and doing a follow up after emergency rental assistance is distributed?

A: As of now this was a one-time addition to an on-going survey our bank does, and we don't have plans to repeat it.

Matthew Doherty, US Interagency Council on Homelessness: The [document I'm going to discuss](#) is part of an ongoing project, which is [The Framework for an Equitable COVID-19 Homelessness Response](#). The key principles are to advance racial justice and equity, address the highest needs first, grow partnerships, get people into housing, and act quickly. We're trying to build stronger systems into the future that capture all of the weaknesses in our current systems. Our new document is about applying these principles to emergency rental assistance resources. It targets not only eviction prevention, but also homelessness prevention. We want to make sure we mobilize these resources in a way that doesn't make inequities worse. This entails differentiating interventions between homelessness diversion, homelessness prevention, and eviction prevention. This is achieved by targeting neighborhoods experiencing the greatest impacts and risks using [this web-based tool](#). The brief also provides guidance on how to target households facing the greatest risks of homelessness, recognizing those risks are racially inequitable. This includes households with prior histories of homelessness, lowest income levels, informal living arrangements, immigrant households, etc.



The program design provides tips for the design and implementation of programs to achieve these community and household targeting priorities; to keep the program design simple and flexible; and to prioritize racial equity. As you look at the equity tool you can see that it’s designed as a checklist, and that’s because we hope it can serve as a resource to service providers and advocates.

Q: Are there any considerations to support precariously housed survivors after a disaster?

A: Part of the intention of the entire project has been to document the strongest practices to address the pandemic specifically, but we were doing that with the intention of making sure we knew what was needed for future disaster response.

Q: Do most/many localities have the data that they need to target high-risk households? If not what would it take to set one up?

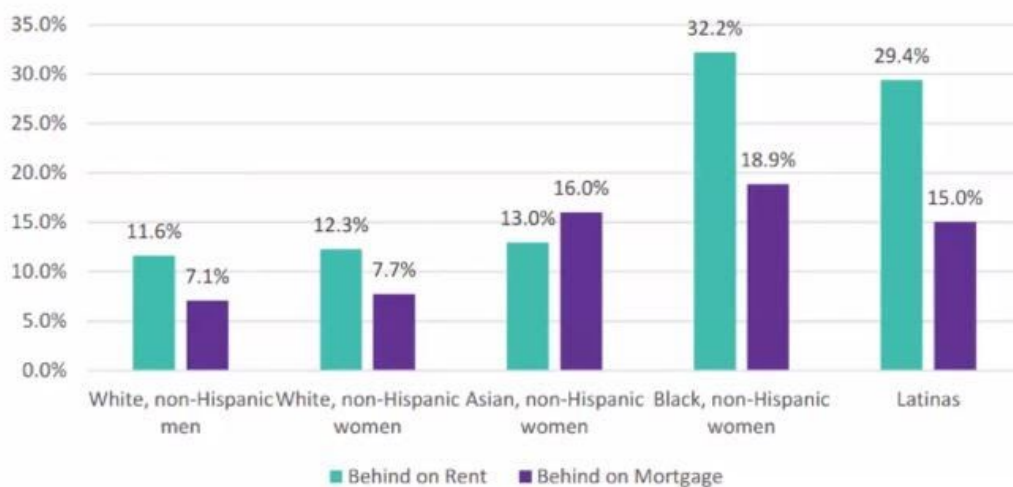
A: Most communities don’t have access to the data ahead of time, but one option is to use the Urban Institute tool I mentioned earlier. Another option is to do data matching between applicants and your local HMIS data system to see if any of these individuals have been in the homelessness system at some point.

Q: Any thoughts about the recommended approach to persuade local governments to include people in informal living situations, in rental assistance eligibility?

A: One option is to look at the HMIS data that shows where people lived right before becoming unhoused, to illustrate that doubling up and other informal living arrangements are often the last stop before losing housing completely.

Claire Ewing-Nelson, Research Fellow, National Women’s Law Center: I’m going to go through the NWLC’s [latest data](#) taken from the U.S. Census Household Pulse Survey. We’re currently in phase 3 of the survey, and it’s authorized through October 2023 so I’m hoping we’ll continue to collect this rich data. At our organization we’ve been analyzing the micro-data so we can crosstab between race and ethnicity. This chart looks at two of the survey questions; about being behind in rent and being behind in mortgage. Notably, nearly one in three Black women said their household was behind on rent, and one third of Latina women said the same. So really startling racial disparities. We also saw startling disparities on food scarcity. So this really illuminates the toll this pandemic is taking on housing and the racial inequities.

Share Who Reported Being Behind on Rent or Mortgage Payments by Selected Demographics (Jan 6 - 18)



Source: NWLC calculations using U.S. Census Bureau, 2020-2021 Household Pulse Survey, using data from week 22 (January 6 – January 18)

NLWC resource: [Over 61.2 million women live in a household that has lost work income since March 2020](#)

Leigh Rachal, ED, Acadiana Regional Coalition on Homelessness and Housing: In January of 2020, our PIT count identified many families experiencing homelessness and that has only tripled with the pandemic. We are trying to figure out how we can assist the unsheltered population with becoming sheltered. We began to fundraise at the beginning of the pandemic, and used those funds to place about 100 unsheltered households in shelters, prior to when the state’s FEMA funding was authorized. At its peak in mid-July there were about 600 households in hotel shelters. Part of the reason for the big increase is the closure in shelter beds, at about a 75% reduction, combined with a 200% increase in homelessness. We’ve been working to rapidly rehouse those households that were sheltered in that program. Unfortunately our reduced ability to add new households to the program means we’ve been seeing a big increase in unsheltered homelessness. Then, we also had two catastrophic hurricanes in the region. Maybe people lost both their home and employment with the hurricane, so that was particularly traumatic. Going into 2021 this region had already seen a

significant increase in homelessness. In early February, we experienced very intense winter weather. We were warned of this in advance, and went to private funding to shelter about 600 households for about 10 days. Through that process we learned a lot about the current unsheltered population. We learned who is living in houses that had been damaged in hurricanes and where they were living. Many of the people in our freeze shelters had not been on our radar previously.

Andrew Bradley, Policy Director, Prosperity Indiana: Our state has the highest number of COVID era evictions according to Eviction Lab, with 33,368 filing since March 2020. By comparison, the next highest is in the 16,000 range. A bill called SEA 148 creates some immediate dangers for renters. It expands the emergency possessory orders (3-day evictions) to include when the tenant is not at-fault. It allowed anti-retaliation protections to be waived in leases. There are other loopholes in anti-retaliation protections, including that tenants are only protected from retaliation if they report code violations that threaten health, which is then up to the judge to interpret. It locks all communities in the lowest common denominator of housing standards, with no ability for local governments to set higher standards of protection.

Natalie James, Prosperity Indiana: This legislative session has been very volatile, with a group of Black legislators being booed and harassed by their colleagues in the hall after testifying, in one instance. So that's set the state for this kind of bill. Some households are facing serious housing habitability issues, so we're collecting stories about living conditions to illustrate how harmful this bill is. Currently it is totally legal to evict a tenant for reporting a serious code violation.

Kristen Taylor, Director of Resident Services, EAH Housing: We're an affordable housing provider in California and Hawaii. We've been scheduling [vaccine clinics](#) in partnerships with Walgreens. We've hosted about 30 clinics so far. There's been less of a need for this in urban communities, but in rural communities residents have really been taking advantage of these. The CDC has been providing helpful information around best practices for vaccine distribution and other COVID health guidelines. Team members from different departments of the company came together to discuss the best messaging to residents to communicate this information. We created consistent documents and templates, called residents, etc. On the day of the clinics we greeted residents with staff from our communities, including staff who speak languages our residents speak so we could provide information and talk through any concerns.

Other resources:

1. The NLIHC will host a webinar on [non-congregate sheltering and FEMA reimbursements](#) on March 16.
2. The Joint Center for Housing Studies at Harvard has released a new study looking at [the impact of COVID-19 on small landlords in Albany and Rochester, NY](#).