



New Survey Results Show Urgent Challenges in Helping People Experiencing Homelessness During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Leaders of the Nation's Homeless Response Systems Report Widespread Shortages of Tests, Staff Resources, Supplies, and Shelter Space

May 28, 2020 (Washington, D.C.) -- New survey results released today by the National Alliance to End Homelessness show that people experiencing homelessness face alarming challenges in accessing the services they need during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The survey was sent to leaders of the nation's 397 regional and local planning bodies that coordinate housing and services funding for people experiencing homelessness in those areas – known as Continuums of Care (CoCs). The results reflect widespread gaps in capacity to test and screen clients and staff, limited access to personal protective equipment, reduced staffing capacity, and a shortage of space for shelter and quarantine that complies with Center for Disease Control guidance. However, the results also highlight strategic work to prioritize health and housing for people experiencing homelessness, and innovative efforts to leverage vacant hotels and motels to expand shelter bed capacity.

[The full results are available in a new report, by lead author Eric Rice, Associate Professor at the USC Suzanne Dworak-Peck School of Social Work, and member of the National Alliance to End Homelessness' Research Council.](#)

Key results include:

Screening and Testing:

- Most CoCs (84%) reported that they are screening all sheltered persons
- When a shelter resident tests positive, only 14% of CoCs had sufficient capacity to test all the residents of that shelter.
- Half of CoCs reported that they had no testing capacity.

Staffing:

- The vast majority of respondents (88%) had frontline staffing shortages, and 63% lacked needed volunteer staff.
- Respondents reported that staff members face extremely high rates of stress (96%), fear of COVID-19 contraction (91%), and exhaustion from increased hours and responsibility (87%)

Supplies:

- Nearly half of CoCs (49%) reported shortages of masks for diagnosed or symptomatic consumers, and more than three-quarters (76%) reported that they did not have enough masks for everyone who was being helped.
- More than half (59%) reported shortages of masks for staff.

Shelter and Housing:

- The vast majority of CoCs (92%) have implemented the recommended distancing of six feet between shelter beds.
- While social distancing has eliminated some beds, 83% of respondents had procured hotel or motel rooms, adding an estimated 7,000 new beds to their system capacity.
- An estimated 2,321 new congregate shelter beds were added by survey respondents, as well as 1,501 permanent housing beds.

Resources:

- State and local funding was the most commonly (66%) cited source of new funds since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, followed by HUD homeless assistance (54%), and private foundation funding (51%). Only 25% of respondents had accessed FEMA funds.
- NOTE: FEMA and CARES Act funding may not have been available at the time of the survey.

Priorities for Funding:

- Most CoCs (51%) reported that the immediate priority for new resources was to access hotel and motel rooms. However, when asked to prioritize future funding, a larger group (56%) reported that permanent housing was the first priority.

“People experiencing homelessness -- living in congregate shelters or on the street -- are at high risk during the COVID-19 pandemic. Homeless programs and systems are struggling to keep them safe and prevent community spread, and their efforts have been innovative and heroic. But as this survey shows, they have lacked the basic resources to succeed,” said Nan Roman, President and CEO of the National Alliance to End Homelessness. “We thank members of Congress for the funds they have provided, but call on them to FULLY meet the emergency needs of people who are homeless during the pandemic, and to support enough funding to ensure that every person in our nation has a home and access to health care.”

About the Survey

The online survey was administered via email by the National Alliance to End Homelessness between April and May of 2020, to leaders of the 397 Continuums of Care (CoCs) throughout the county. Surveys were submitted by 168 CoCs, representing 42% of all CoCs in the US. The results were supplemented with a round of phone interviews with a sampling of the CoC contacts. The selections were designed to ensure diversity according to region of the country, general population size, and HUD-defined CoC type (which are defined as: major cities, other urban, suburban, and rural).

About the National Alliance to End Homelessness The National Alliance to End Homelessness is a nonprofit, non-partisan, organization committed to preventing and ending homelessness in the United States. As a leading voice on the issue of homelessness, the Alliance analyzes policy and develops pragmatic, cost-effective policy solutions; works collaboratively with the public, private, and nonprofit sectors to build state and local capacity; and provides data and research to policymakers and elected officials in order to inform policy debates and educate the public and opinion leaders nationwide.

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