



Frequently Asked Questions Related to COVID-19 (Coronavirus)

March 17, 2020

1. Why are people experiencing homelessness more vulnerable to COVID-19?

Medical researchers say people experiencing homelessness have a double vulnerability to COVID-19 (Coronavirus). They are more susceptible to contracting the disease caused by the virus because of the cramped quarters in shelters, the sharing of utensils and the lack of hand-washing stations on the streets. Further, they often have underlying medical conditions and a lack of reliable health care. By definition, homeless people have nowhere to self-quarantine, increasing their vulnerability.

2. Are you planning to close the PADS Shelters?

We are committed to providing shelter and meals to those who are among the hardest hit by COVID-19 infection concerns. Effective Tuesday, March 17 we will centralize PADS Shelter services and Support Center services at one location at Oak Park Temple 1235 N. Harlem Avenue, Oak Park. This centralization will be in effect through March 30.

We are grateful for the generous help of Oak Park Temple, our Support Congregations and volunteers, and the determination of our staff, which is making this possible. We are following CDC recommendations to prevent the spread of infection. We are closely monitoring the evolving COVID-19 issue so that we can provide the most effective and nimble response possible, while assuring uninterrupted services. Our leadership team has convened a command central and are meeting as frequently as needed to assess and reassess the situation.

We are working with our local governments and public health bodies to expand local resources that will allow the most effective response to the needs of people experiencing homelessness and at risk of homelessness. We will keep you updated on our progress.

3. Are Housing Forward's other services continuing during this issue?

The Oak Park Walk-In Center, 6634 W. Roosevelt Road, 2nd floor, remains open for at-risk households in need of emergency financial assistance, per regular office hours. Outreach Staff is still interacting with unsheltered people in the communities we serve. Our Supportive Housing and Sojourner House program staff are checking-in with clients by telephone regularly. Clients who report that they are sick will be encouraged to call their primary healthcare provider.

We are assessing the most effective deployment of our staff members on a day-to-day basis. We are encouraging staff members to safeguard their health and the health of their families. At times, this may result in temporary changes in our staffing patterns. We ask clients and collaborating professionals to check in with their agency contact.

4. What are you using to guide your planning and decision-making?

Our agency leadership is working to stay informed and prepared. We are in communication with the Village of Oak Park's Public Health Department and the Cook County Department of Public Health. We are up to date on HUD's recommendations via *Infectious Disease Preparedness for Homeless Assistance Providers and Their Partners* and have enacted recommendations from the CDC guidance for homeless shelters.

Here are some additional resources regarding COVID-19 we are using to guide our response.

[CDC: Interim Guidance for Homeless Service Providers to Plan and Respond to Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\)](#)

[Centers for Disease Control: About Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\)](#)

[Illinois Department of Public Health: Coronavirus Disease \(COVID-19\): Frequently asked Questions](#)

Illinois Department of Public Health COVID-19 Questions Hotline 800.889.3931

5. How are you safeguarding the clients, volunteers and staff at the shelter sites?

The health and safety of our clients, volunteers and staff are our top priority. Housing Forward is collaborating with the Village of Oak Park and Cook County as part of a coordinated response to the virus outbreak. We are following guidance from the CDC and other sources, mentioned above.

Our immediate focus is increased efforts to protect the health of clients and volunteers at the nightly shelter sites, graciously hosted by local faith communities, as our clients often face medical conditions that make them more vulnerable. These efforts are summarized on the [HOUSING FORWARD RESPONSE TO COVID-19 webpage](#).

6. What will you do if/when a shelter client exhibits symptoms of COVID-19?

All clients entering shelter sites will undergo a simple health screening focused on symptoms of COVID-19. Clients exhibiting a combination of fever of 100.4 degrees or more, persistent cough and shortness of breath will be separated from the rest of the shelter population and referred to immediate follow-up medical care. If symptoms appear while in shelter, we will follow the same protocol.

7. Are volunteers being asked to work during this outbreak?

Although we can't run shelter operations without the invaluable help of our volunteers, we do not want to put anyone at risk. If a volunteer is ill, we ask them to stay home but we hope they will find an alternate volunteer to cover their shift. In addition, if a volunteer feels they are in a vulnerable group (Seniors, those with a decreased immune system strength etc.) we also understand completely. We stress that lining up a sub and/or contacting us at volunteer@housingforward.org or 708.338.1724 ext. 220 is greatly appreciated.

8. What can people do to help?

We are deeply grateful for members of the community who want to help. There are several ways to make an impact:

- **VOLUNTEER.** We may need additional shelter volunteers and meal providers to ensure the continued operation of our PADS Emergency Shelter. We also may need to organize a transport system to move clients between shelter and our shower facility in Maywood. Contact Enid Johnson at eJohnson@housingforward.org or 708.338.1724 ext. 220) to learn about volunteer needs.

- DONATE SUPPLIES. We have updated our [Amazon Smile Shelter Wish List](#) to include items we anticipate needing in the near future, like disinfectant wipes, hand sanitizer, disinfectant soap, bleach etc.
- DONATE DINING GIFT CARDS. Gift cards in smaller denominations to McDonald, Starbucks and Dunkin Donuts are especially helpful for clients. Many of their typical daytime resources are currently closed; having a destination for a coffee or lunchtime meal is helpful.
- DONATE FOOD. Coffee, snacks and lunch supplies are appreciated by 24/7 clients. (Delivered to 1851 S. 9th Ave.)
NOTE: If you are dropping off a donation, please heed the current recommendations for social distancing. We are happy to meet you at your car to receive your donation. Please call 708.338.1724, option 0, to arrange.
- GET CONNECTED. Please follow our Facebook account to be more quickly informed of service changes @HousingForward and then share that information on your social network. If you are a current volunteer, also join the Housing Forward Volunteers Facebook Group.
- DONATE FUNDS. This evolving situation has led to a growing number of unexpected agency costs such as additional food and shelter supplies, arranging additional transportation for clients, and arranging motel/SRO stays for our most vulnerable clients. As the situation continues, financial donations are very much appreciated. To make a donation to our [Emergency Response Fund, click here.](#)

We thank our supporters for joining us in this important work on behalf of those in West Suburban Cook County who are already vulnerable; now even more so.

If you have questions, please contact any of the following staff:

SHELTER

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OPERATIONS

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