

Daily Update: Homeless populations in the context of COVID-19

Date: 1 April 2020

Please note this document is not comprehensive, but the result of a scan of recent news articles, literature, and organizational guidelines.

What select jurisdictions (within Canada, Europe, and Asia) are doing to support homeless populations during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Summary of Recent Initiatives/Actions:

Further details and references for today's update in **Appendix A
Additional noted research articles in **Appendix B**, and noted news articles in **Appendix C***

1. Use of parking lots as homeless shelters (white-lined spaces) (Las Vegas, USA)
2. Firefighters will not be responding to emergency medical calls (Montreal)
3. COVID-19 testing near shelters (Winnipeg)
4. Central command team of doctors & public health experts, divided into 2 teams: symptomatic and not (UK)
5. All 'rough sleepers' to be housed (UK)
6. 'Local coordination cell' bridging local authority and Health Authorities (UK)
7. Stopping homeless people congregating in shelters and street encampments (UK)
8. Triaging homeless people into (3): symptomatic; pre-existing conditions but non symptomatic; others (UK)
9. Separating homeless with "significant drug and alcohol needs" from those without (UK)
10. Hotels/hostels/B&Bs to offer accommodation to key workers and vulnerable people (UK)
11. Requisitioning hotels/holiday homes/Airbnbs for homeless (London, Paris, Prague, Barcelona)

In previous updates:

1. Outdoor day centres (Montreal)
2. Former Hospital repurposed for homeless population care (Montreal)
3. Homeless isolation sites specifically for families and youth (Montreal)
4. Hotel rooms for families currently in shelters for distancing and access to cooking (Montreal)
5. Emergency housing for families at risk of displacement (Boston, USA)

6. Homeless isolation/treatment shelters with separate floors for homeless people awaiting results and those who are COVID-positive (Montreal)
7. Isolation centre with 24-hour nursing team (Ottawa)
8. Mobile unit (to visit shelters and other sites) (Ottawa)
9. Distribution of tents for distancing (Toronto)
10. Eviction freeze of homeless encampments (with monitoring) (Toronto; USA)
 - as per CDC recommendations: [Responding to Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\) among People Experiencing Unsheltered Homelessness](#) [Updated 22.3.20 : see previous Daily Update series document]
11. Screening at entrance to shelter (Boston, USA)
12. 24/7 Medical tent (Boston, USA)
13. 24/7 Hotline and mobile service to support shelter (Boston, USA)
14. Creation of RV Village to house self-isolating individuals (Los Angeles; Texas, USA)
15. Mobile hygiene clinic that visits camps on a rotating basis to offer showers and toiletries. (Texas, USA)
16. Any symptomatic homeless person immediately housed in hotel while awaiting results (Montreal)
17. Increased access to washing facilities and medical and psychological care (Germany)
18. “Donation fences” where public can hang bags of basic supplies (Germany)
19. Volunteer ride-hailing taxi drivers to ferry homeless symptomatic people to their hotel rooms (London, UK)
20. Anyone experiencing or at risk of homelessness can contact Homeless Hotline (Queensland, Australia)
21. Enhancing Home Assist Secure program to provide support for older people or those with a disability who need essential supplies and services. (Queensland, Australia)
22. Change to homeless food programming: hours, structure, delivery system (Berlin, Germany, Copenhagen, Denmark, Detroit, USA)
23. City contracting restaurants as part of a pilot program to deliver meals to homeless shelters (Cambridge, USA)
24. Plans for “Tiny house villages” (Seattle, USA)
25. Drop-in homeless centers (Montreal; Edmonton; Toronto; Ottawa)
26. Increased shelters for distancing (Ottawa; Toronto; France; Germany)
27. Isolation/recovery specific shelters (Edmonton; Toronto; Atlanta; UK)
28. Hotel rooms booked for 14-day isolations (Toronto)
29. Hotels/Community centers/offices repurposed for shelters/isolation/COVID-19 positive cases (Toronto; France; London, UK; Texas)
30. “Rapid housing access” for shelter users (Toronto)
31. Flexible rent for rent-geared-to-income population (Toronto)
32. Freeze on evictions (France)
33. Outreach education and screening teams (Atlanta; Seattle; New York, USA)
34. Testing sites specifically for homeless population (Atlanta)
35. Expanded Emergency Assistance program/ reduced requirements for Social-assistance (Ontario)
36. 15-minute home test kits – antibody testing distributed by pharmacy or amazon (UK)

New/Updated guidelines from WHO, BCCDC, USA CDC, other related organizations

1. Government of Canada (Regular Updates). Coronavirus disease (COVID-19): Outbreak update
<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection.html>
 - (UPDATED 3.28.20) What health professionals need to know
<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/health-professionals.html>
2. Government of Canada (UPDATED 27.3.20) Public health management of cases and contacts associated with novel coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/health-professionals/interim-guidance-cases-contacts.html>
3. Canadian Network for the Health and Housing of People Experiencing Homelessness
<http://cnh3.ca/resources/>
 - [Briefing and Recommendations on Isolation and Quarantine COVID-19 in the Homelessness Service Sector](#)
 - Also includes: Frameworks, Webinars, Fact Sheets
4. Ontario Ministry of Health (23.03.20) COVID-19 Guidance: Consumption and Treatment Services (CTS) Sites
http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/coronavirus/docs/2019_consumption_treatment_services_guidance.pdf
5. City of Toronto (30.03.20) Infection Prevention and Control Tips for Homelessness Service Setting Providers <https://www.toronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/956a-COVID-19-IPAC-Tips-for-Homelessness-Service-Setting-Providers.pdf>
6. Toronto Public Health (23.03.30) Pandemic Plan A Planning Guide for Housing Service Providers and Shelters https://www.toronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/8ee1-TPH-Pandemic-Plan_Planning-Guide-for-Housing-Service-Providers-and-Shelters.pdf
7. The Lancet (26.03.20) UK efforts to protect homeless people from COVID-19 in UK
[https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanres/article/PIIS2213-2600\(20\)30160-0/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanres/article/PIIS2213-2600(20)30160-0/fulltext)

APPENDIX A: Further details: What select jurisdictions (within Canada, Europe, and Asia) are doing to support homeless populations during the COVID-19 pandemic.

CANADA

1. Global News (27.03.20). Coronavirus: Winnipeg organizations working to support homeless population <https://globalnews.ca/news/6740207/coronavirus-winnipeg-organizations-homeless-population/>
 - Organizations serving the homeless population in Winnipeg are working to implement new measures:
 - Overflow emergency shelter spaces big enough to accommodate social-distancing measures
 - Individual rooms for quarantine purposes
 - COVID-19 testing near shelters
 - Health and safety supplies such as masks, gloves and sanitizer
2. Montreal Gazette (30.03.20). Homeless man dies in Montreal after testing positive for COVID-19 <https://montrealgazette.com/news/local-news/coronavirus-live-updates-firefighters-no-long-responding-to-medical-calls/>
 - Montreal Mayor Valérie Plante announced that new outdoor day centers and emergency shelters will open their doors today to accommodate homeless people.
 - Montreal firefighters will not be responding to emergency medical calls because of the coronavirus pandemic. Only ambulance workers will be dispatched to respond to medical calls
 - Also noted in the article:
 - An elderly homeless man died in a hospital Sunday after testing positive for COVID-19.
 - First reported death of a homeless person in connection with the coronavirus pandemic in Montreal

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

3. Global News (31.03.20). Coronavirus outbreak: Homeless area set up as Nevada seeks supplies amid outbreak <https://globalnews.ca/video/6756245/coronavirus-outbreak-homeless-area-set-up-as-nevada-seeks-supplies-amid-outbreak/>
 - People unable to use a shelter tied to a coronavirus case laying out blankets on white-lined patches of pavement in Las Vegas.
 - Residents were preparing to sleep in areas marked by painted boxes on the ground of a parking lot at a makeshift camp for the homeless
4. Fox News (31.03.20). Coronavirus strikes homeless in Los Angeles and Seattle as local officials grapple with outbreak <https://www.foxnews.com/politics/coronavirus-strikes-homeless-in-los-angeles-and-seattle-as-local-officials-grapple-with-outbreak>
 - The first cases of COVID-19 have been reported among the homeless in Los Angeles and Seattle

- California Gov. Gavin Newsom announced earlier this month that the state would be prioritizing the homeless as a vulnerable population and authorized the spending of \$150 million in emergency funding to protect homeless individuals amid the coronavirus pandemic.
- Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti said that officials were setting up 250 handwashing stations in homeless encampments, making more public toilets available, working to open 14 more homeless shelters by July
- Homeless outreach workers in Seattle are sending any individuals with coronavirus-like symptoms to one of King County's quarantine sites until their results come back
- Downtown Emergency Services Center (Seattle) would like to move every resident of their homeless shelters into their own hotel or motel room to prevent any further spread of the virus
- Las Vegas said it opened an emergency homeless shelter in a parking lot after a man tested positive for coronavirus at another facility.

INTERNATIONAL

5. BBC News (27.3.20). Coronavirus: All rough sleepers in England 'to be housed'.
<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-52063939>
 - All rough sleepers in England should be found a roof over their head by this weekend, ministers have said.
 - The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) said it was "redoubling its efforts" to make sure everyone was "inside and safe".
 - On Friday afternoon the housing minister Luke Hall wrote to councils with details of how to implement the government's plans. These include:
 - Setting up a "a local coordination cell" to plan and manage the response to coronavirus, bringing together the local authority and the NHS
 - Stopping homeless people congregating in shelters and street encampments
 - "Urgently procuring accommodation for people on the streets"
 - Triaging homeless people "where possible" into three groups: those with symptoms of COVID19; those with pre-existing conditions but without symptoms; and those without any of the above
 - Securing access to food and medical care for rehoused people
 - Separating people with "significant drug and alcohol needs" from those without
6. BBC News (31.3.20). Coronavirus: Man told he must sleep on streets to get help
<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-oxfordshire-52036174>
 - UK Man reported being told he had to sleep rough before he could be placed into temporary accommodation or supported housing, following UK measures that require "hotels, hostels, campsites and caravan parks to close unless key workers need to stay there, or if other people staying there cannot return to their primary residence."
 - Oxford City Council denied the report & emergency accommodations were found
 - Minister for Homelessness Luke Hall clarified hotels, hostels and B&Bs could open to offer accommodation to key workers and vulnerable people. On Thursday Hall wrote to all English

local authorities asking them to provide accommodation for all rough sleepers.

7. DW News (31.3.20). Berlin opens first hostel for the homeless amid coronavirus pandemic
<https://www.dw.com/en/berlin-opens-first-hostel-for-the-homeless-amid-coronavirus-pandemic/a-52972263>
 - Berlin on Wednesday will open its first ever hostel for homeless people
 - Each room will have a maximum occupancy of two. There will also be a separate floor with 20 beds reserved specifically for woman

8. The Guardian (31.2.20) Europe's homeless hit hard by coronavirus response
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/31/europes-homeless-hit-hard-by-coronavirus-response>
 - Efforts to minimise spread among homeless have ranged from instructions for shelters in Amsterdam to be shut during the day, forcing people into the open, to “herding” people into gymnasiums in Paris to keep them from gathering outside.
 - In Italy: Police have been handing fines to homeless people.
 - In Brussels and Paris: Rough sleepers and families living in temporary accommodation, including children, are not able to get enough food “because of the lack of protective material [for social workers at food banks and day centres].”
 - In Prague: Social workers were sewing together masks and gloves from scrap material due to the lack of protective equipment.
 - Positive steps: London, Paris, Prague, Barcelona and elsewhere have recently started requisitioning hotels, holiday homes and Airbnb properties for homeless people.
 - Problems with isolating infected: Some social workers claim homeless were being divided based simply on the hint of a cough.
 - Sector advocates are calling for protected gear for people working in the homeless sector, and for homeless services to be considered as essential services.

9. Daily Mail (30.3.20). Homeless to be moved from the streets and into rooms at a \$260-a-night five-star hotel to protect them from coronavirus <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-8169771/Homeless-moved-streets-five-star-hotels-coronavirus-crisis.html>
 - Homeless people could be moved from the streets and into hotels in Perth, Australia for the 'Hotels with Heart' pilot.
 - Rough sleepers would be accommodated at Perth's Pan Pacific hotel for a month

10. Kirby, T. (2020). Efforts escalate to protect homeless people from COVID-19 in UK. The Lancet Respiratory Medicine. [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanres/article/PIIS2213-2600\(20\)30160-0/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanres/article/PIIS2213-2600(20)30160-0/fulltext)
 - UK rolling out “COVID-19 Homeless Sector Plan” during week of March 23, 2020
 - Rough sleepers/those at risk of rough sleeping will be supported by £3.2 million of initial emergency funding if need to self-isolate. The funding will be available to all local authorities in England and will reimburse for the cost of providing accommodation and services

- Central command team of doctors & public health experts, divided into
 - i. **COVID-CARE**, for people who are symptomatic or have tested positive
 - ii. **COVID-PROTECT**, for people who have other medical vulnerabilities who are asymptomatic or screen negative, but who also need to self-isolate.
 - CARE and PROTECT facilities could include unused hotels or other facilities adopted for this purpose. CARE facilities will provide medical support to confirmed cases
- Team developing plan includes NHS England, Public Health England, the Great London Authority, UK Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Authorities, general practitioners (GPs) with experience in providing outreach services for the homeless, and outreach specialists in London/nationwide.
- Government and NHS have approved roll out of the plan across London and nationwide, following the agreement of details with local authorities across England.

APPENDIX B: Research Articles of Note

1. Hwang, S. W., Kiss, A., Ho, M. M., Leung, C. S., & Gundlapalli, A. V. (2008). Infectious disease exposures and contact tracing in homeless shelters. *Journal of health care for the poor and underserved*, 19(4), 1163. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4465825/>
 - Data from Toronto were used to examine the number of shelter residents potentially exposed in the event of such an outbreak.
 - A shelter user has contact with a mean of 97 other residents (range, 1–292) in one day and a mean of 120 (range, 2–624) in eight days.
 - After a single week, contact tracing becomes difficult due to the challenge of locating homeless people who have left the shelter system.
 - Over an 8-day period, individuals who used more than one shelter had contact with an average of 98 more other shelter residents than those who stayed in a single shelter had.
 - At the onset of a serious outbreak, it may be desirable to institute policies that strongly encourage individuals to remain at their current shelter for the duration of the outbreak
2. Hsieh, Y. H., King, C. C., Chen, C. W., Ho, M. S., Lee, J. Y., Liu, F. C., ... & JulianWu, J. S. (2005). Quarantine for SARS, Taiwan. *Emerging infectious diseases*, 11(2), 278. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3320446/>
 - Lessons from SARS:
 - Discuss the temporal effects of quarantine measures and other interventions on detection and isolation as well as the potential usefulness of quarantine in faster identification of persons with SARS and in improving isolation measures.
3. JAMA (12.3.20) Supporting the Health Care Workforce During the COVID-19 Global Epidemic <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama/article-abstract/2763136>
4. University of Pennsylvania (27.3.20). Estimated Emergency and Observational/ Quarantine Capacity Need for the US Homeless Population Related to COVID-19 Exposure by County; Projected Hospitalizations, Intensive Care Units and Mortality <https://works.bepress.com/dan-treglia/1/download/>

APPENDIX C: News Articles of Note

1. Toronto.com (31.03.20). First homeless shelter worker tests positive for coronavirus, sparking calls for increased protection <https://www.toronto.com/news-story/9920486-first-homeless-shelter-worker-tests-positive-for-coronavirus-sparking-calls-for-increased-protection/>
 - The first worker at a Toronto homeless shelter has tested positive for COVID-19
 - There are four confirmed cases of COVID-19 related to clients in the shelter system
 - Coun. Cressy “we desperately need to ensure that PPE is available and provided to those on the frontlines — in healthcare and emergency services for sure — but also in community and social service settings”
2. Boston Globe (31.03.20). 8 Boston homeless people test positive for coronavirus. <https://www.bostonglobe.com/2020/03/30/nation/5-boston-homeless-people-test-positive-coronavirus/>
 - Of the eight who tested positive, five spent time at local shelters in recent days
 - City public health workers contact-traced and isolated 14 or 15 people who had been in contact with one of the infected people
 - Several others remain in isolation at local hospitals and shelters while they wait for test results
3. Stat News (31.03.20). A radical approach to preventing Covid-19 infection in the homeless. *Miriam Komaromy, M.D., Medical Director of the Grayken Center for Addiction at Boston Medical Center. Michael Botticelli Grayken Center’s Executive Director, former director of the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy 2014-2017.* <https://www.statnews.com/2020/03/31/a-radical-approach-to-preventing-covid-19-infection-in-the-homeless/>
 - Use suddenly empty and available living spaces — empty dorm and hotel rooms, abandoned offices — to provide safe, private housing for individuals and families who are living on the street or in shelters.
 - Must be tackled in tandem with this plan is effective treatment of addiction.
 - If we fail to adequately treat withdrawal and provide effective maintenance medications, such as buprenorphine and methadone, then people will be unable to adhere to measures to limit viral spread, including isolation, quarantine, or housing.
4. LA Times (28.03.20). Why a fight over homeless people could determine how much coronavirus hurts California <https://www.latimes.com/homeless-housing/story/2020-03-27/coronavirus-homeless-shelters-california-cities-confusion>
 - Realisation that many beds and rooms originally planned for homeless people might instead be needed for patients if hospitals are full, or for doctors, nurses and first responders who may be unable to return to their homes between shifts for fear of infecting their families
 - Staffing shortages: There aren’t enough people to provide services for the newly housed. “You can’t just put somebody in a hotel room. You have to be able to monitor them and make sure that you can check on their temperature or, if they are symptomatic, you can check health.”

- Across the United States, nearly 22,000 homeless people, or 4.3% of the homeless population, could require hospitalization, though researchers say the final number could go as high as 10%. More than 7,000 may need to be placed in intensive care. Researchers estimate that 400,000 additional beds at a cost of \$11.5 billion would be required to address the country's emergency quarantine and shelter needs.
 - Research cited: <https://ph.ucla.edu/news/press-release/2020/mar/researchers-estimate-covid-19-may-lead-hospitalization-more-21000-people>

- 5. Yahoo News UK, (31.3.2020) Coronavirus: Why there have been so few deaths in Hong Kong
<https://au.news.yahoo.com/hong-kong-coronavirus-cases-deaths-105634996.html>
 - Hong Kong has recorded only 714 coronavirus cases and only four deaths.
 - Low rate attributed to experience in 2003 SARS outbreak which saw 299 deaths including 4 doctors
 - 97% of Hong Kong people use face masks
 - 100 doctors specialised in infectious diseases or clinical microbiology and infection
 - All confirmed or suspected cases are isolated

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