

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

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Date: 31 March 2020 (Weekend update covering: March 27-30, 2020)

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*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*

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)

### *In previous updates:*

1. Any symptomatic homeless person immediately housed in hotel while awaiting results (Montreal)
2. Increased access to washing facilities and medical and psychological care (Germany)
3. "Donation fences" where public can hang bags of basic supplies (Germany)

4. Volunteer ride-hailing taxi drivers to ferry homeless symptomatic people to their hotel rooms  
(London, UK)
5. Anyone experiencing or at risk of homelessness can contact Homeless Hotline  
(Queensland, Australia)
6. Enhancing Home Assist Secure program to provide support for older people or those with a disability who need essential supplies and services.  
(Queensland, Australia)
7. Change to homeless food programming: hours, structure, delivery system  
(Berlin, Germany, Copenhagen, Denmark, Detroit, USA)
8. City contracting restaurants as part of a pilot program to deliver meals to homeless shelters  
(Cambridge, USA)
9. Plans for “Tiny house villages”  
(Seattle, USA)
10. Drop-in homeless centers  
(Montreal; Edmonton; Toronto; Ottawa)
11. Increased shelters for distancing  
(Ottawa; Toronto; France; Germany)
12. Isolation/recovery specific shelters  
(Edmonton; Toronto; Atlanta; UK)
13. Hotel rooms booked for 14-day isolations  
(Toronto)
14. Hotels/Community centers/offices repurposed for shelters/isolation/COVID-19 positive cases  
(Toronto; France; London, UK; Texas, USA)
15. “Rapid housing access” for shelter users  
(Toronto)
16. Flexible rent for rent-geared-to-income population  
(Toronto)
17. Freeze on evictions  
(France)
18. Outreach education and screening teams  
(Atlanta; Seattle; New York, USA)
19. Testing sites specifically for homeless population  
(Atlanta)
20. Expanded Emergency Assistance program/ reduced requirements for Social-assistance  
(Ontario)
21. 15-minute home test kits – antibody testing distributed by pharmacy or amazon  
(United Kingdom)

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

1. WHO (UPDATED 30.3.20) Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) technical guidance: Maintaining Essential Health Services and Systems <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/technical-guidance/maintaining-essential-health-services-and-systems>
  - WHO releases guidelines to help countries maintain essential health services during the COVID-19 pandemic
  - World Health Organization (WHO) has updated operational planning guidelines in balancing the demands of responding directly to COVID-19 while maintaining essential health service delivery, and mitigating the risk of system collapse. This includes a set of targeted immediate actions that countries should consider at national, regional, and local level to reorganize and maintain access to high-quality essential health services for all.
2. WHO (NEW 28.3.20) Severe Acute Respiratory Infections Treatment Centre <https://www.who.int/publications-detail/severe-acute-respiratory-infections-treatment-centre>
  - This is the first edition of the practical manual to set up and manage a severe acute respiratory infection (SARI) treatment centre and a SARI screening facility in health-care facilities. The document has been developed to meet the operational needs emerging with the COVID-19 pandemic.
3. Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness [Coronavirus resources for the homelessness sector](#)
  - [Pandemic Preparedness and Homelessness: Lessons from H1N1 in Canada](#) (Canadian Observatory on Homelessness)
  - [Toronto Pandemic Influenza Plan: A Planning Guide for Homeless and Housing Service Providers](#) (Toronto Public Health)
  - [Pandemic Planning and Services that Support People Who are Homeless](#) (OrgCode)
  - [Disease Risks and Homelessness](#) resource and [Infectious Diseases Toolkit for CoCs](#) (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development)
  - [Homelessness and the Response to Emerging Infectious Disease Outbreaks: Lessons from SARS](#) (National Center for Biotechnology Information)
4. Government of Alberta (3.30). Guidance for Providers of Services to Albertans Experiencing (or at-risk of) Homelessness: 2019 Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) Prevention and Preparation <https://www.alberta.ca/assets/documents/covid-19-guidance-for-shelters.pdf>
5. BCCDC. (regular updates posted). Emerging Respiratory Viruses. <http://www.bccdc.ca/health-professionals/data-reports/communicable-diseases/emerging-respiratory-virus-updates>
6. Organizations dedicated to housing and homelessness issues may also provide valuable sources of information. Recent examples from Canada include:
  - [https://www.orgcode.com/pandemic\\_planning\\_and\\_services\\_that\\_support\\_people\\_who\\_are\\_homeless](https://www.orgcode.com/pandemic_planning_and_services_that_support_people_who_are_homeless)
  - <https://www.homelesshub.ca/blog/pandemic-planning-how-can-my-agency-prepare-potential-spreadcoronavirus>
  - <https://caeh.ca/coronavirus-resources/>

## **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. CBC Montreal (29.3.20). Under state of emergency, Montreal opens 2 outdoor day centres for city's homeless <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/montreal/homeless-day-centres-shelter-food-coronavirus-1.5513945>

- Using powers made available under the local state of emergency, the City of Montreal opened two outdoor day centres Saturday to provide food and services to the city's population of homeless people during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The centres will have tents to provide shelter during bad weather and offer space for people to get food, facilities to wash up, and access to social workers and health-care workers.
- There are plans to open three more day centres, and the city is also preparing several night shelters that provide enough space between beds to adhere to physical distancing rules.

UPDATE: MSN (29.3.20). Coronavirus outbreak: Five temporary homeless shelters open in Montreal <https://www.msn.com/en-ca/video/watch/coronavirus-outbreak-five-temporary-homeless-shelters-open-in-montreal/vp-BB11QEBm>

### PREVIOUS:

Montreal Gazette (28.3.20). Plante declares state of emergency in Montreal to help homeless, slow spread of coronavirus <https://montrealgazette.com/news/local-news/coronavirus-strategy-for-us-is-coming-a-little-too-late-homeless-man-says/>

- Montreal Mayor Valérie Plante declared the city has entered into in a state of emergency on Friday with the goal of providing aid to the homeless and prevent the spread of the coronavirus.
  - The mayor said late Friday afternoon. “I declared the state of emergency because our resources for the homeless need reinforcements and we need them now. It is the most vulnerable among us who need us.
  - Former Royal Victoria Hospital was being modified to help homeless people diagnosed with the coronavirus or awaiting the result of a test to determine if they have it. Those already diagnosed with the virus will be placed on one floor, while those awaiting test results will be sheltered on another.
  - New shelters will be set up in the coming days. The city will also set up outdoor day centres in public spaces frequented by the homeless. There will be five sites that can welcome 1,000 people per day,” Plante said, while adding the first site will be at Cabot Square in the heart of downtown.
2. CTV News Ottawa (25.03.20). <https://ottawa.ctvnews.ca/five-people-in-self-isolation-at-centre-for-ottawa-s-homeless-1.4867673>
    - Five homeless people have symptoms of the virus – not yet confirmed cases of COVID-19
    - City has taken precaution to take people who have respiratory symptoms, and have a cough and fever, and remove them from others so they can be isolated
    - Housing Services has also identified a 29-room location to provide isolation space for families and youth, which is anticipated to open the week of April 1.

- City of Ottawa is also working to identify additional hotel rooms for families currently in the shelter and motel system to promote social distancing, and to increase access to cooking facilities.

*PREVIOUS:*

1. CTV News Ottawa (21.03.20) COVID-19 isolation centre for Ottawa homeless to open in Lowertown <https://ottawa.ctvnews.ca/covid-19-isolation-centre-for-ottawa-homeless-to-open-in-lowertown-1.4862819>
  - Opened new centre for Ottawa’s homeless population to self-isolate during the COVID-19 pandemic. First of its kind in the city, the Routhier Community Centre
  - This will be the self-isolation facility for people from the homeless community that do, or are thought to have, COVID-19
  - 10 beds, but will eventually have a capacity of 40. It’s divided into several rooms, including separate rooms for women and men to sleep
  - Front-line and client care workers will be onsite to care for the people at the centre, led by a 24-hour nursing team, along with physicians led by Dr. Jeff Turnbull
  - Ottawa Inner City Health also has a mobile unit that has been visiting shelters and other spots around the city
2. <https://ottawacitizen.com/news/local-news/homeless-sick-unable-to-isolate-shelter-sector-working-on-covid-19-plans>
  - Ottawa Inner City Health has decided to commandeer a mobile clinic that can assess people at any shelter location in a special van
  - Meals being staggered in an effort at social distancing and box lunches are being prepared to be handed out and eaten outside. Cleaning regimens have been stepped up
  - Visits restricted to hospice beds in one shelter.
3. 680 News (29.03.20). City of Toronto acquires hotels, rental buildings for homeless in response to coronavirus <https://www.680news.com/2020/03/29/toronto-homeless-coronavirus-hotels/>
  - Toronto has acquired hotels and residential buildings as part of it’s “integrated homelessness response to COVID-19,”
  - Five hotels have been acquired with another five in the process of being secured. Two vacant rental buildings are also in the process of being acquired and 50 permanent housing units have been identified. He added that 19 households have secured permanent housing.
  - In addition to the nine existing sites the city has already opened to facilitate social distancing within the shelter system.
4. Globe and Mail (27.03.20). Charities resort to distributing tents to Toronto’s homeless <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/canada/article-charities-resort-to-distributing-tents-to-torontos-homeless/>
  - Some charities are distributing tents to Toronto’s homeless, encouraging them to camp out in the city’s ravines rather than take their chances in its crowded shelter system
  - City has pledged not to evict homeless people camping out in ravines or other areas for now, although it does say it will monitor encampments for health and safety concerns.

- Chairman of Toronto’s Board of Health, Councillor Cressy argues that simply handing out tents would further alienate homeless people from medical and other help. He said the city was doing all it can: “We had a homelessness crisis before COVID-19. So we are starting in a crisis situation.”

#### UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

5. Boston Health Care for the Homeless Program (30.3.20). <https://www.bhchp.org/covid-19-response-efforts>
  - Screening individuals for COVID-19 at the entrance of shelters to identify patients with a potential positive diagnosis;
  - Operating three testing tents at large-volume sites;
  - Operating a newly-transformed wing of respite program as an isolation unit for patients diagnosed with the virus
  - Equipping and operating 24/7 the City’s two new medical tents designed to accommodate the anticipated large volume of people who screen positively, giving a safe place to be isolated while test results are secured and receive care for their symptoms.
  - Operating a 24/7 hotline and mobile service to field concerns from shelter staff, particularly during off-hours, when a person arrives with suspected contact or symptoms.
6. Seattle.gov. Mayor Durkan (28.3.20). Homelessness Response. <https://www.seattle.gov/homelessness>
  - Deployment and maintenance of six additional hygiene facilities throughout the City
  - Critical outreach: focused exclusively on getting important public health information out to people living unsheltered and distributing hygiene kits. The team has makes referrals to shelter and remains one of the few groups continuing to conduct outreach in the field during the pandemic.
7. NBC Miami (19.03.20). What’s Being Done to Protect the Homeless During the COVID-19 Pandemic? <https://www.nbcmiami.com/news/local/whats-being-done-to-protect-the-homeless-during-the-covid-19-pandemic/2208401/>
  - In Miami Dade County, 14 handwashing stations have been set up on the streets. Workers are also giving out hand sanitizer at facilities and information sheets in three languages.
  - When it comes to aiding the homeless, Book says to leave it to the professionals: “We would urge the public do not, do not put spare change in homeless panhandlers' buckets, cups and hats right now”
8. Texas Observer (26.03.20). COVID-19 Reveals the Urgent Need to House the Homeless <https://www.texasobserver.org/homeless-covid-19-texas/>
  - Last week, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention issued guidance that local governments should stop clearing out homeless encampments to avoid scattering potentially infected individuals.
  - In Austin, The Other Ones Foundation is operating a mobile hygiene clinic that visits camps on a rotating basis to offer showers and toiletries.

9. USA Today (30.03.20). RVs get new role as 'quarantine and isolation housing' and for homeless  
<https://www.usatoday.com/story/travel/2020/03/30/coronavirus-crisis-rvs-motor-homes-used-quarantine-homeless/5080088002/>
  - LA County has brought recreational vehicles to a State Beach for housing homeless people in quarantined for coronavirus
  
10. The Root (30.03.20). Selflessness on the Menu: Detroit Restaurants Use Food to Feed Homeless After Being Forced to Close <https://www.theroot.com/selflessness-on-the-menu-detroit-restaurants-use-food-1842563540>
  - Five Detroit chefs have put together a program called “Too Many Cooks in the Kitchen for Good.” They are taking food that would have spoiled after bars and restaurants were ordered to close until at least April 13, and using it to cook meals for the homeless and others in need.
  
11. NBC Boston (30.03.20). <https://www.nbcboston.com/news/local/mayor-marty-walsh-to-provide-update-on-bostons-coronavirus-response/2099399/>
  - Boston Housing Authority and Boston Public Schools are creating a new partnership to house up to 1,000 families with local students at risk of displacement. Outreach will begin immediately to expand housing support for residents during and after the coronavirus emergency.
  - Sunday announced the city had created hundreds of new beds for homeless people amid the coronavirus outbreak.
  
12. Curbed NY (25.03.20) Coronavirus in NYC: How the city is protecting the homeless  
<https://ny.curbed.com/2020/3/13/21178079/coronavirus-nyc-homeless-services-covid-19>
  - Cases have already been identified in >59 shelter locations, and as of 25th March two homeless individuals have died
  - Residents of city shelters reporting facilities not being adequately cleaned. “Social distancing is not being practiced... crowding in the dining room area every night”
  - Advocacy groups have asked Gov. Andrew Cuomo and Mayor Bill de Blasio to take clear, specific steps to protect the homeless for the duration of the outbreak, including providing hand-washing stations, hygiene kits, food, portable toilets, and tents for individuals on the streets; ending law enforcement programs that target homeless individuals
  - Recommendations for shelters to keep residents safe during the pandemic include providing written materials, trainings, and videos about spreading the disease, frequent cleaning, making sure staff and visitors do not enter if they are sick,
  - Largest NY shelter provider: “We are very mindful at Win about what we can do to appropriately distance based on CDC guidance, but also, how we can keep a sense of connection—because homeless people feel every single day like they are ‘other’. [We] don’t want that to escalate”  
*PREVIOUS:*  
Curbed Los Angeles (20.03.20). 6,000 shelter beds to open at rec centers in ‘unprecedented’ action to house LA’s homeless

<https://la.curbed.com/2020/3/18/21186253/homeless-shelters-recreation-centers-los-angeles>

- Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti announced the city would turn 42 recreation centers into temporary housing with 6,000 shelter beds for homeless individuals

## INTERNATIONAL

### 13. Launch Housing COVID-19: First Responders Help Melbourne's Homeless

<https://www.launchhousing.org.au/covid-19-first-responders-help-melbournes-homeless/>

- Mobile outreach teams, crisis centres and other services remain open and are helping people experiencing homelessness and rough sleeping in Melbourne
- Melbourne has prioritised front-line services, including essential outreach work and maintaining 24 hour crisis accommodation services
- Homeless clients are being directed to one of 12 screening clinics at major hospitals for testing and care
- Non-essential visitors are being banned from housing facilities
- Outreach clients are supported by phone instead of by home visits where possible, and clients are being transported by taxi to get to their appointments

### 14. Conde Nast Traveler (30.03.20). Michelin-Starred Restaurant in Copenhagen Is Feeding the Homeless During the Coronavirus Outbreak <https://www.cntraveler.com/story/the-chemist-copenhagen-is-feeding-the-homeless-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak>

### 15. Al Jazeera Germany (26.03.20). COVID-19 lockdown hits Berlin's unemployed, homeless and refugees <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/covid-19-lockdown-hits-berlin-unemployed-homeless-refugees-200326195143645.html>

- Germany worried about those “slipping through the net” because they are not German, or because of the city's housing problems. People are desperate to find a flat, so are living in sublets or with semi-legal housing contracts, which means they can't fully register here and access any services”
- Meal programs: food bags with sandwiches, apples and plums are being handed out from a window and distribution times are staggered to limit human contact
- Housebound volunteers, mostly strangers to each other, raised over \$15k (CAD), connecting people in the city in need of food, medical or mental health support.

## APPENDIX B: Research Articles of Note

1. Leung, C. S., Ho, M. M., Kiss, A., Gundlapalli, A. V, Hwang, S. W., CS, L., ... SW, H. (2008). [Homelessness and the response to emerging infectious disease outbreaks: lessons from SARS.](#) *Journal of Urban Health*, 85(3), 402–410.
  - During the 2003 severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) outbreak in Toronto, the potential introduction of SARS into the homeless population was a serious concern.
  - Planning for future outbreaks should take into account the need to:
    - (1) develop systems that enable rapid two-way communication between public health officials and homeless service providers,
    - (2) ensure that homeless service providers have access to infection control supplies and staff training,
    - (3) prepare for possible homeless shelter closures due to staff shortages or high attack rates among clients, and
    - (4) plan for where and how clinically ill homeless individuals will be isolated and treated. The Toronto SARS experience provided insights that are relevant to response planning for future outbreaks in cities with substantial numbers of homeless individuals.
  
1. Wood, L., Davies, A., & Khan, Z. (2020). [COVID-19 precautions—easier said than done when patients are homeless.](#) *The Medical Journal of Australia*, 212(8), 1.
  
2. Tsai, J., & Wilson, M. (2020). [COVID-19: a potential public health problem for homeless populations.](#) *The Lancet Public Health*.
  
3. Yao, H., Chen, J.-H., & Xu, Y.-F. (2020, April). [Patients with mental health disorders in the COVID-19 epidemic.](#) *The Lancet. Psychiatry*. England.
  - In China, 173 million people are living with mental health disorders and neglect and stigma regarding these conditions still prevail in society
  - Mental health disorders can increase the risk of infections. Possible explanations include cognitive impairment, little awareness of risk, and confined conditions in psychiatric wards
  - People with mental disorders can be exposed to more barriers in accessing timely health services, because of discrimination associated with mental ill-health in health-care settings
  - People with mental health conditions could be more substantially influenced by the emotional responses brought on by the COVID-19 epidemic, resulting in relapses or worsening of an already existing mental health condition
  
4. Canady, V. A. (2020). [COVID-19 outbreak represents a new way of mental health service delivery.](#) *Mental Health Weekly*, 30(12), 1–4.
  - Increased mental health disorders, prolonged isolation, hospital bed adequacy, lost revenue and staff safety are among the myriad of concerns the field is dealing with in the wake of the COVID-19 epidemic. And for some staff, protective gear is in order.

5. Yang, Y., Li, W., Zhang, Q., et al. (2020). [COVID-19 outbreak represents a new way of mental health service delivery](#). *The Lancet | Correspondence*, 7(4), 19.
- China: largest ageing population globally. In 2017, more than 30 million people >80 years old, > 40 million required long-term care due to disabilities
  - Mental health problems are common in older Chinese adults (i.e., ≥55 years), with the prevalence of depressive symptoms reported to be 23.6% in this population
  - SARS-CoV-2 and high death rate could exacerbate the risk of mental health problems and worsen existing psychiatric symptoms, further impairing their daily functioning and cognition]765432
  - online mental health services have been widely adopted but Older adults have limited access/ability to access to internet services.
  - The current mass quarantines and restrictions to public transport have inevitably become a major barrier to access maintenance treatments for this group.
  - There seems to be insufficient and inadequate attention paid to this vulnerable population in the recently established crisis psychological services in China. Stakeholders and health policy makers should collaborate to resolve this barrier in order to provide high-quality, timely crisis psychological services to community-dwelling older adults.

## APPENDIX B: News Articles of Note

1. The USA has reported its first homeless fatalities today in New York, Los Angeles, and Seattle:  
<https://people.com/health/first-homeless-person-new-york-city-dies-from-coronavirus/>  
<https://hotair.com/archives/john-s-2/2020/03/30/la-seattle-announce-first-coronavirus-cases-among-homeless/>
2. CNBC (28.3.20). New York orders thousands of manually operated pump ventilators as coronavirus cases surge: 'This is the alternative' <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/03/28/coronavirus-new-york-orders-thousands-of-manually-operated-pump-ventilators.html%20/>
  - NYC anticipates requiring 140,000 hospital beds and 30,000 ventilators when the outbreak reaches its peak in 14 to 21 days.
  - Coronavirus patients in New York will have to resort to using bag valve masks if the Empire State doesn't have enough ventilators, Gov. Andrew Cuomo said in a press conference on Saturday.
  - "We're even talking about training National Guard people to learn how to operate this device, which is relatively simple to operate, but you need a lot of people to operate this 24 hours a day for each patient," he said.
  - New York has already purchased about 3,000 bag valve masks and ordered 4,000 more, according to Cuomo.
3. Globe and Mail: Opinion. Dr Liu (29.3.20). I've fought epidemics around the world. Now it's Canada that must prepare for the worst. <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/article-ive-fought-epidemics-around-the-world-now-its-canada-that-must/>

Joanne Liu is a physician and the former international president of Médecins Sans Frontières:

  - There are three steps that must be taken now:
    1. As much as possible/feasible, we need to set up medical facilities dedicated only to COVID-19 patients: either stand-alone structures or a separate hospital within a hospital. Dedicated staff in dedicated facilities will more quickly develop the individual and collective expertise to handle COVID-19 patients; reduce the volume of personal protection equipment (PPE); decrease the risk of medical facilities becoming centres of amplification.
    2. Our health-care workers are our best and last line of defence in a pandemic. For their sake and ours, we need to protect their physical and mental health. We need to: make sure they have the right PPE; help them decide how to triage loss of life by developing guidelines; provide access to psychological counselling and support.
    3. We must ensure that critical care to non-COVID-19 patients is maintained.

**Nicole Cragg, RN(C) - Clinical Nurse Educator**  
**Regional Overdose Emergency Response**  
**Vancouver Coastal Health**