



UNSHELTERED HOMELESS: GUIDANCE FOR MICHIGAN LOCAL GOVERNMENT & LAW ENFORCEMENT

Michigan.gov/Coronavirus

How to engage with unsheltered homeless during COVID-19

Michigan had over 65,000 individuals experiencing homelessness in 2018, with approximately half of that population being adults and children in families. A recent national study attempting to model the impact of COVID-19 on the homeless population predicts that when compared to the general population, individuals experiencing homelessness are twice as likely to be hospitalized, two to four times as likely to require critical care, and two to three times as likely to die. The unsheltered homeless population, or those individuals and families living on the street, in vehicles, or in other places not fit for human habitation, are especially vulnerable during this time due to underlying physical and health concerns, lack of access to healthcare and sanitation facilities, and barriers to 24-hour shelter.

The following guidance for local government and law enforcement follows recommendations from the Center for Disease Control (CDC) and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) on how to best care for and protect unsheltered individuals experiencing homelessness during our response to COVID-19.

1. **Interaction with unsheltered homeless under Stay Home, Stay Safe**

order – Executive Order 2020-21 requires all Michigan residents to stay in their homes unless they are reporting to work as a critical infrastructure employee. As individuals experiencing homelessness do not have a permanent residence and many Michigan communities lack a 24-hour shelter, local government and law enforcement should:

- Make these individuals exempt from any fees or penalties issued under this order. Penalizing these individuals with additional costs or placing them in jail settings where the spread of COVID-19 is more likely to occur will exacerbate their financial recovery and put their health and the health of others at risk.
- Implement an immediate moratorium on vehicle ticketing, towing, and impoundments. Many individuals and families choose to occupy their vehicles instead of staying in public shelters. Maintaining this form of shelter will allow them to distance themselves from others in non-congregate settings.

2. **Encampments** – Though these are not ideal living conditions at any time, existing encampments may provide opportunities for individuals and families to shelter in place, maintain distancing, and prevent the scattering of individuals exposed to COVID-19, further spreading infection. Local government and law enforcement should:
 - Implement an immediate moratorium on sweeping encampment and seizing tents and other private property.
 - Make campgrounds or other appropriate facilities available and accessible.
 - Provide 24-hour access to restrooms and sanitation stations with clean water, soap, and sanitizer. If restrooms are not available, set up portable handwashing stations.
 - Post appropriate signage regarding updated COVID-19 information and what to do if an individual or their family member is sick, information about safe social distancing and sanitation practices, and contact information for local resources and services.
 - Partner with available community resources, including street outreach workers, behavioral health workers, street medicine or public health departments, and healthcare workers to monitor and provide medical services.
 - Partner with local sanitation and public works to maintain sanitation supplies and trash pick-up.

3. **Partnerships** – It is essential that homeless service providers be included in emergency response and planning in order to limit the risk to service staff and individuals experiencing homelessness. Local government and law enforcement should:
 - Include members of the homeless response system, including leadership in the local Continuum of Care/Local Planning Body, shelter staff, and street outreach workers, in emergency management teams and ongoing communications.
 - Create and maintain relationships with members of the homeless response system, including outreach workers and shelter staff, to link unsheltered homeless individuals to available resources. Homeless service providers continue to connect individuals and families to permanent housing opportunities and services during the pandemic.
 - Work with hospitals and healthcare facilities to create and enforce discharge policies so that COVID-19 patients without housing are not discharged without a place to stay.

Community Examples:

City of Los Angeles is deploying police officers to shelters (including newly established temporary facilities) to support ongoing efforts while providing them additional resources for their health and safety including access to additional hand washing stations and opening a 24-hour temporary lodging facility for law enforcement which provides sleeping quarters, meals, showers, etc. for officers if they prefer not to go home and risk exposure for their families.

Michigan COVID-19 Response – Information to Assist the Homeless

<https://www.michigan.gov/mcteh/0,8782,7-349-78543-522105--,00.html>

References:

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National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty (2020). *COVID-19 Statement and Recommendations*. Retrieved from: <http://nlchp.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/COVID-19-Statement.pdf>

U.S. Dept of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) (2020). *Infectious Disease Toolkit for Continuums of Care: Preventing and Managing the Spread of Infectious Disease within Encampments*. Retrieved from: <https://files.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/Infectious-Disease-Toolkit-for-CoCs-Preventing-and-Managing-the-Spread-of-Infectious-Disease-within-Encampments.pdf>

Facing 'New Era', LAPD Working To Protect Homeless, Officers From COVID-19
<https://losangeles.cbslocal.com/2020/03/26/covid-19-coronavirus-lapd-police-la-homeless/>

Eugene (OR) Police Response During COVID-19 Pandemic <https://www.eugene-or.gov/DocumentCenter/View/53726/Police-Response-during-COVID-19-pandemic-3-27-20>

Guidance drafted in partnership with the Michigan Coalition Against Homelessness (MCAH).