



## OFFICE OF COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

HOWARD COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY RESOURCES AND SERVICES

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### COVID-19 RESPONSE AND THE HOMELESS SYSTEM

WEEKLY CALL: FRIDAY, MARCH 20, 2020

**Staff:** Jackie Scott, Rose Burton, Jennifer Corcoran, Liz van Oeveren, Keisha Benjamin, Colleen Baumgartner

**Health Department:** Dr. Jackie Douge

**Partners:** Jen Broderick, Karen Booth, Ayesha Holmes, Jenn Pollitt-Hill, Sheryl Neverson, Jim Sents, Jack Kavanaugh, Darlene Jolly, Sam Tucker, Donna Sturdivant

#### **Guidance Information & Updates:**

Jennifer Corcoran provided basics on guidance being provided for emergency shelter from Federal level – space, supplies, staff. One variance we are seeing between Federal guidance and local response is that Grassroots and HopeWorks plan to close entry to new households once someone in their facility is found to be positive for COVID-19, meaning our shelter capacity will not increase, but rather stay the same or potentially decrease.

Keisha Benjamin shared information from Maryland DHCD held this morning with CoCs across the State. Other jurisdictions reported coordination with their local Health Departments, which are providing support to the homeless system, especially in the area of hotel use. One community has cleared a men's shelter by placing everyone in motel so that the facility can be used as a space for isolation. Baltimore City is trying to decrease the influx to shelter by working with the hospital around discharge procedures, including having the hospital contact shelter ahead of time about those being discharged.

Rose Burton asked Grassroots and HopeWorks to share status of coordination with Howard General and the Health Department. Introduced Dr. Jackie Douge from the Health Department as guest on the call for Q&A.

**Grassroots** reported they do not have formal planning but have been working with the hospital on a case-by-case basis. Grassroots reported they have designated two rooms and a bathroom as a quarantine area, are engaging in "extreme cleaning," and are sending anyone with a temperature over 100 degrees to the hospital.

Grassroots needs:

- Has nursing staff on-site through the substance use disorders program (during this crisis, BHA has loosened restrictions on the services they can provide) but [would like back-up CNAs](#).
- Concerned about not having a sufficient level of [protective gear](#) for staff and requests community planning efforts beyond DCRS.

- Grassroots reported that the [DRC needs water pallets](#) and that they are providing food mainly to those experiencing literal homelessness but to some others as well; no numbers to report at this time.

Jennifer Corcoran reiterated guidance that people experiencing symptoms should contact the ER before showing up, given concerns about overwhelming hospitals as well the potential for exposure to COVID-19 of an individual who does not already have it.

Dr. Douge reinforced that this is the guidance of the Howard County Health Department.

**HopeWorks** reported that they are screening everyone before entry to Safe House, though they have not been receiving a lot of requests right now. They have decided they will place symptomatic households into hotel as their space configuration does not allow the amount of distancing being specified in Federal guidance.

HopeWorks needs:

- Requesting [faster access to testing](#) for COVID-19

Dr. Douge shared there are varied testing protocols depending on whether someone accesses testing through a private medical provider or through the State, though in all cases testing is limited.

- Grassroots reported approximately 75% of Grassroots shelter guests have a PCP
- HopeWorks will check on those in their shelter

Dr. Douge reported that after someone is tested, it could take hours or days for them to get a result, and there needs to be a place for them to wait. Though the CDC has developed guidance for shelters, the Health Department does not have specific recommendations for Howard County shelters.

**Volunteers of America** reported that things have been operating smoothly at The Residences at Leola Dorsey. Staff and residents are using universal precautions and they are setting up the capacity for tele-health in the building. However, there has been a backorder on supplies, and people who do not have masks are using bandanas.

VOA needs:

- Asked for [guidance on use of bandanas](#) in the absence of masks

Dr. Douge stated bandanas do not constitute Personal Protective Equipment and the CDC has stated they should only be used as a last resort.

Dr. Neverson also stated VOA is working with residents on developing stockpiles of food in case they have to quarantine for an extended period of time. Jim Sents reported VOA will provide food and water to anyone who has to self-quarantine.

**Bridges to Housing Stability** reported they have closed their office and staff are contacting clients through email, text, and zoom. She reported rehousing efforts have slowed, and though some clients have expressed concern about food security as the crisis wears into the future, they are

mainly worried about rent. Even though evictions are on hold for the moment, rent charges continue to accrue and so tenants will have large amounts due once the current situation stabilizes.

**Humanim** reported they are supporting approximately 200 people in the community, while many of their staff have children who are out of school or who are sick themselves. Only one resident has been tested (result was negative), but many are self-quarantining due to flu-like symptoms.

- Humanim has placed a large order for non-perishable food supplies through its social enterprise division, and Karen [will explore whether water can be accessed through this mechanism and shared with other providers.](#)

**Corrections** reported that they have 6 bedrolls and mattresses that can be used as overflow shelter (Rose will inform Ayesha, as she had to leave the call early); they will also provide meals to anyone using those beds. Darlene reported the Detention Center is quarantining everyone who enters for two weeks. They have also cancelled in-person visitation and special programming. Re-Entry staff are only responding to people with immediate needs and doing so with caution.

**DCRS - Jackie Scott** reported that DCRS has submitted requests for PPE's and supplies through its Office of Emergency Management. First responders are at the top of the list for supplies, but requests made by providers on last week's homeless system call were included in the DCRS request. There is recognition that shelter is on the front line of the response.

- **Liz Van Oeveren** shared that she will be participating in DHCD's weekly calls. She will be sharing the concerns expressed today through a survey DHCD sent out; DHCD is supposed to have responses to at least some concerns as early as next Friday.

**Next Call:** Friday, March 27, 2020 – 12:00-1:00PM; WebEx invite to follow.