



## How You Can Help the Homeless During Coronavirus

By Caitlyn Conville

Back in March, California governor Gavin Newsom estimated that up to 60,000 homeless people in the state could end up contracting COVID-19. A month later, at least 56 positive cases among residents and staff were recorded at a single homeless shelter in Los Angeles' Skid Row, with that number expected to increase as more test results come in. And that is only one neighborhood.

Cities across the nation are taking action to protect some of their most vulnerable citizens, but their efforts are just barely enough against the novel coronavirus.

Governor Newsom had also announced that California would use \$50 million to lease hotel rooms and buy 1,300 travel trailers for emergency housing. Reserving hotel rooms is quickly becoming a popular solution in several cities, with Dallas, Texas approving over \$1.6 million for shelter at local hotels for first responders and the homeless until September.

And yet homeless shelters are still taking the brunt of the coronavirus chaos.

Restaurants that used to donate food are now closed, leaving shelters scrambling to find another supplier and afford food on their measly budgets. Shelters have had to try and optimize their already limited space while adjusting to social distancing guidelines, but that means the more cramped shelters are now forced to turn people away.

Adrienne Bush, the executive director of the Kentucky Homeless and Housing Coalition, says that “some smaller, privately-run homeless shelters in rural areas have shut down completely.”

“The shelters in Kentucky were never well-funded to begin with,” Bush said. “Now with the demand for homeless services and the need to isolate people, we don’t have the facilities or staffing to handle this during a pandemic.”

The executive director for a Lexington-based domestic violence shelter says that dust control masks she found at a local hardware store are her clients’ and staff’s only protective gear.

In New York and San Francisco, shelter employees earning just minimum wage have no choice but to bring their own gloves, face masks, and hand sanitizer.

There is no time to wait around for more government funding, and this is where the general public can step up!

"We're seeing a great need for cleaning supplies, gloves, masks, hand sanitizer, water bottles, and similar items," Nan Roman, president and CEO of the National Alliance to End Homelessness told Newsweek. "People should consult the web and social media pages of the providers in their area to see if they have a wish list."

Team Corona Busters has helpfully provided links on their website to video tutorials, templates, and DIY instructions on how to make CDC-approved face masks at home, so you can make and donate multiple batches to those in need.

There are some items that homeless shelters could always have more of: bottled water, nonperishable food, toothbrushes and toothpaste, toilet paper, and of course, monetary donations.

Shelters are also now asking for extra fluids like soup, juice, and Gatorade, as well as tents, pillows, and blankets in case they need to move people outside. You can donate to projects like Sheltersuit, who supply homeless people with specially-designed waterproof, insulated jackets made from upcycled materials that transform into sleeping bags.

Make sure to call or email your local homeless shelter ahead of time. While they will certainly be appreciative of the gesture, they have got a lot on their plate already. Showing up announced with a truckload of donations will not do a busy, understaffed shelter any favors.

Homeless communities need our help now more than ever, and if we each rise to the occasion and provide for people in need, COVID-19 does not stand a chance.

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