

Project Roomkey:

California's Effort to Protect
People Experiencing Homelessness
in the COVID-19 Response



CDSS

CALIFORNIA
DEPARTMENT OF
SOCIAL SERVICES

Housing and Homelessness Branch

California Department of Social Services (CDSS)

Project Roomkey

- Locally driven, State supported initiative, created to provide emergency housing in hotels/motels/and trailers for sick and medically vulnerable individuals experiencing homelessness in response to COVID 19
- Goals are to mitigate transmission, reduce hospital surge, and protect lives
- Goal of 15,000 units
- \$150M in state funding made available to support COVID-19 response for people experiencing homelessness



*Photo by Michael Owen
Baker/Los Angeles County*

State Role

- In addition to funding the effort, various State agencies provide ongoing public health guidance, training materials, master agreement for wrap-around services, technical assistance in emergency operations
- Hotel/motel identification and occupancy agreement negotiation
- Support the connection to essential behavioral health and health care services including telehealth
- Ensure deployment of resources match the need of counties with significant homeless populations that are also experiencing high concentrations of COVID-19 transmission



FEMA Approval of Non-Congregate Shelter

- California made a request for FEMA Public Assistance on March 25, 2020
- State received approval on March 27, 2020
- California was the first state to obtain approval from FEMA to provide non-congregate housing alternatives for people with unstable housing who may need to quarantine in response to COVID-19



*Photo by Michael Owen
Baker/Los Angeles County*

FEMA Reimbursement

- 75% FEMA reimbursement to state or local government
- Non-congregate shelter and wrap around services directly necessary for the safe and secure operation of facilities are reimbursable
- Case management and behavioral health services not reimbursable
- Approval through April 30, 2020, with opportunity to request extension
- Must maintain tracking mechanism to provide sufficient data and documentation to establish eligibility - plan to use HMIS



Populations Served through FEMA Assistance

1. Individuals who test positive for COVID-19 that do not require hospitalization, but need isolation or quarantine (including those exiting from hospitals);
2. Individuals who have been exposed to COVID-19 (as documented by a state or local public health official, or medical health professional) that do not require hospitalization, but need isolation or quarantine; and
3. Individuals who are asymptomatic, but are at “high-risk,” such as people over 65 or who have certain underlying health conditions (respiratory, compromised immunities, chronic disease), and who require Emergency NCS as a social distancing measure.



Rationale for FEMA Approval

- Individuals lacking stable housing are more likely to use hospital emergency rooms.
- Patients experiencing homelessness are admitted to inpatient units 5 times more often than people who have stable housing.
- Protecting individuals experiencing homelessness will relieve pressure on the hospital system by separating high-risk individuals who are homeless from COVID-positive or persons under investigation (PUI), in order to protect public health and safety for the duration of this public health emergency.



Providing on-going housing support to Project Roomkey clients post-crisis

- Goal is to provide on-going housing support to individual after the crisis
- State exploring opportunities to support counties that wish to purchase hotel and motels for conversion to permanent supportive housing



*Photo by Michael Owen
Baker/Los Angeles County*

Lessons Learned

- Ensure emergency response systems prioritize people experiencing homelessness and that responses are guided by public health lens
- Invest in a broad hotel/motel outreach and negotiation strategy
- Include homeless service providers in the operations of the housing settings
- Be prepared to tackle issues related to PPE and workforce shortages
- Have a streamlined strategy for who moves in to hotel rooms
- Don't lose sight of opportunities for permanent housing

