



Together we can end relationship abuse

Things to Consider for Shelter Programs During COVID-19

People experiencing homelessness often have a higher risk for exposure to communicable diseases, including survivors of domestic violence. Survivors need the support of domestic violence service providers, regardless of the COVID-19 pandemic, but even more so now that they are possibly isolated in an unsafe home. This document is designed to support programs and advocates with challenges in shelter that may arise during this time. These considerations and conversation tips are designed to support shelter programs and their staff with some of the challenges they may face due to the current pandemic. This document includes considerations for shelter programs and conversation tips for trauma informed conversations with shelter residents about COVID-19 and their needs. Physical distancing and isolation can be difficult in communal living settings for both staff and survivors, but they are crucial in reducing exposure to COVID-19.

Short Term Housing Closures

- Some cities and counties are closing short term housing options and asking residents to leave. It is very important that DV programs be in contact with their local public health department for the most recent and updated information related to this.
- DV Programs should reach out to the county and be prepared to make an argument for why they need to stay open, including safety, their residents are community members not generally tourists and losing their funding and having to close as an organization.
- Violence Free Colorado, the Domestic Violence Program, and others continue to advocate on behalf of the domestic violence programs and survivors they work with to continue services to survivors during this challenging time.

Shelter Residents and Physical Distancing

- Programs should enhance their cleaning efforts to reduce the spread of illness amongst both staff and residents. It may be appropriate to reduce the number of staff on site during this time. See below for additional considerations related to this
- Post visible, easily read information about COVID19 throughout shelter. Talk with each resident about this information.
- Post the following basic principles everywhere. Provide this information and review it with all staff. Ask all staff to agree to these practices to improve the safety and health of everyone.
 - If you are ill, stay home.
 - If you are showing symptoms of COVID19, call your primary care physician, or if none, the local



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county health department. Do not show up at medical facilities unannounced or undirected.

- Programs should consider dedicating specific rooms or spaces in the shelter for folks that are symptomatic. This allows programs to reduce exposure to non-symptomatic residents.
- When those rooms are occupied programs should be prepared to resource with survivors as they typically do (hotel, other DV shelter, other short-term housing resources).
- Programs may consider alternative room arrangements for singles and families. For example, programs may place individuals or singles in their own room and keeping families in a room together.
- Shelter staff should work with residents to staff meal prep and mealtimes if there is a large number of residents in shelter to decrease interaction.

Utilizing Hotel Funding

- Programs are encouraged to use flexible funding to access hotel accommodations for survivors if you are not able to bring new residents in to shelter, if survivors need additional social distancing and isolation precautions, and/or if other housing options are unavailable.
- Some hotels have started to screen individuals for COVID-19, but it is important to remember that individuals with communicable diseases use hotels often without disclosing these health concerns. This situation is not any different, survivors can choose to disclose or not disclose.
 - Hotels have cleaning products and cleaning standards meant to address health and safety standards. This should not be a reason to turn people away.
- Some hotels in Colorado have started to close, but many are still open and need business.
 - o Advocate with hotels in your area, urging them to stay open (or even reopen) during this time
 - o Explain how your program supports survivors with payment, if applicable.
 - o You could even offer to waive housekeeping service and provide the survivor with supplies to do this themselves, similar to many shelter expectations. It never hurts to ask!

Currently COVA Emergency Funds can be used to fund hotel stays for survivors working with an advocate for up to two weeks – [Click Here For More Information](#)

Reducing Shelter Staff

- Programs may need to reduce and/or stagger the shelter staff so there are fewer people on the property at one time.
- Programs are encouraged to cross-train other program staff, especially those who are not immune-compromised, to cover shelter shifts.



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- It may be appropriate to increase compensation for staff doing shelter or other frontline work during this time. This could look like dedicated self-care time, time and a half pay, flexibility in scheduling, etc.
– Think equity rather than equality.

- We recommend programs update their policies as soon as possible and get them approved via your Boards of Directors before expending funds on paid leave, including paid administrative leave, that is not already covered in existing policies to ensure grant reimbursement. Your Board should be able to approve this policy change via email or phone. Please let us know if you have questions or concerns.

Tips and Sample Script for Conversations About COVID-19

This tool should be used to support survivors and their family's needs during their time in shelter. It is not meant to be used as a screening tool, rather as a conversation starter. Programs can consider discussing this after survivors have screened and entered shelter, for example during your intake paperwork or first advocacy session. Advocates should continue to use a trauma informed lens when having these conversations and working with survivors with various needs during this time, they are skilled in having difficult conversations with survivors, and this is not different. Physical distancing and isolation can be difficult in communal living settings for both staff and survivors, but they are crucial in reducing exposure to COVID-19.

Sample Script:

With the rapidly spreading COVID-19 virus, _____ (Organization Name) is committed to do all we can to support the health and safety of our Shelter residents, staff and volunteers. Symptoms of the virus include fever, cough and shortness of breath. Anyone in the Shelter with these symptoms must wear a mask and will be placed in an area separate from other Shelter residents. To protect others, everyone in the Shelter is expected to practice social distancing.

Additional Questions/Considerations:

- Do you have any questions or concerns about these expectations?
- Are they agreeable to you?
- What support or accommodations might you and/or your family need given this information?
- Is there anything else that you would like to share?