



OZARKS ALLIANCE TO *End* HOMELESSNESS
Community Partnership's Ozarks Alliance to End Homelessness
COVID-19 Response Plan

Background

Community Partnership's Ozarks Alliance to End Homelessness (OAEH), the HUD-designated Continuum of Care for Springfield/Greene, Christian, and Webster counties, worked closely with direct service providers, the City of Springfield, Greene County Office of Emergency Management (OEM), and other partners to develop and implement a community-wide COVID-19 Response Plan for individuals experiencing homelessness. This plan is intended to function as a working document; recommendations in this plan are based on what is currently known about COVID-19 and will be updated as more information becomes available. This plan follows guidance recommended by the Centers for Disease Control, City of Springfield, Department of Housing and Urban Development, Greene County Office of Emergency Management, National Alliance to End Homelessness, National Healthcare for the Homeless Council, Springfield Greene County Health Department, and United States Interagency Council on Homelessness.

On March 18, 2020 the Ozarks Alliance to End Homelessness convened a COVID-19 Task Force comprised of 20 partner agencies to understand and address needs of individuals experiencing homelessness related to COVID-19. Partner agencies include:

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| Burrell- PATH | Mercy |
| Catholic Charities of Southern Missouri | MSU Care |
| City of Springfield | OACAC |
| Community Partnership | Office of Emergency Management/COAD |
| CoxHealth | Safe to Sleep |
| East Sunshine Church of Christ | Salvation Army |
| Gathering Friends for the Homeless | Springfield/Greene County Health Department |
| Grace United Methodist | The Kitchen, Inc. |
| Great Circle | Veterans Coming Home |
| Isabel's House | Victory Mission |

The OAEH COVID-19 Task Force's main goal is to prevent and address the spread of COVID-19 among individuals experiencing homelessness. The OAEH COVID-19 Task Force worked with OEM and Springfield Greene County Health Department to establish two parallel tracks to address the specific needs of individuals experiencing homelessness during this crisis. OEM and the Springfield Greene County Health Department are leading efforts to ensure our community can effectively serve individuals who have COVID-19 symptoms and have tested positive (or are in the process of being tested). The OAEH COVID-19 Task Force is leading efforts to ensure our community has an effective response for individuals experiencing homelessness who are hyper-vulnerable to contracting the virus (due to age, chronic health conditions, or pregnancy) and to ensure that health, hunger, and hygiene needs are met during this crisis.

Community Need

On any given night, there are approximately 500 individuals experiencing homelessness in our community, 200 of whom are literally unsheltered (sleeping somewhere not meant for human habitation). While there are emergency shelters available, they are often at capacity or have had to decrease numbers served to help stop the spread of COVID-19. Individuals experiencing homelessness are at a higher risk for COVID-19, according to the [National Health Care for the Homeless Council](#).

Goals

This plan includes 5 broad goals and accompanying action items to prevent and address the spread of COVID-19 among individuals experiencing homelessness.

- 1) Facilitate Community Education and Engagement
- 2) Sustain Existing Shelters and Housing Options
- 3) Create Alternative Shelter Options
- 4) Meet Health, Hunger, and Hygiene Needs
- 5) Prevent Future Episodes of Homelessness (as a result of COVID-19)

Facilitate Community Education and Engagement

The OAEH has strong relationships with direct service providers. Because of this, the OAEH will provide a unified voice to the broader community and serve as central hub for communication between homeless service agencies, advocates, the City of Springfield (including Springfield/Greene County Health Department) and OEM. The OAEH will also provide education to individuals experiencing homelessness and to the rest of the community on ways that individuals and business can support this system of care.

Action Items:

- Educate the community on our system-wide response to COVID-19 via regular media updates, central website for updates, and marketing for individuals, agencies, and healthcare providers. Marketing may include but is not limited to printed signs, flyers, and brochures to communicate updates on available services and the appropriate referral processes as service delivery continues to change
- Inform individuals experiencing homelessness on available supports and how to stay healthy via flyers, centralized phone number (updated daily), and outreach
- Connect agencies to donors and volunteers to help meet needs, via partnership with Community Partnership of the Ozarks, Community Foundation of the Ozarks and United Way of the Ozarks, to ensure a high level of community coordination and efficient use of limited resources
- Facilitate a central communication hub for service providers via daily (or as needed) calls and regular email updates

Sustain Existing Shelter and Permanent Housing Options

The OAEH will work to support existing shelters and housing programs as they move people into permanent housing with a housing first approach.

Action Items:

- Adapt Coordinated Entry System to continue to meet needs and move people into permanent housing as service delivery options change
- Collaborate to help providers access adequate supplies/protective equipment
- Share guidance and best practices from federal, state, and local governments and partners to support shelters in improved operations and compliance with safety protocols and City codes.
- Explore all available funding options through HUD (including Continuum of Care and Emergency Solution Grants), local foundation grants, and corporate/individual donation requests

Create Alternative Shelter Options

The OAEH will work with partners to create additional alternative shelter options for individuals while prioritizing those who are hyper-vulnerable to COVID-19.

Action Items:

- Expand shelter options for hyper-vulnerable populations to limit exposure and/or transmission, including day centers, overnight emergency shelters, and other alternative shelter options (for example, hotel rooms) as needs are identified
- Support OEM and Springfield/Greene County Health Department in development of Special Needs Medical Center, which will serve individuals experiencing homelessness who have tested positive for COVID-19 as they exit the hospital system
- Explore all available funding options through HUD (including Continuum of Care and Emergency Solution Grants), local foundation grants, and corporate/individual donation requests

Meet Health, Hunger, and Hygiene Needs

Individuals experiencing homelessness often have limited access to recommended preventative measures such as handwashing, showers, social isolation, and self-quarantine options. As social service agencies adapt how they deliver services, it is critical that we have a community response to meeting basic health, hunger, and hygiene needs. The OAEH will listen to individuals with lived experience to understand needs and work to ensure basic needs are met in a trauma-informed way.

Action Items:

- Partner with advocates to provide food assistance via outreach and delivery to ensure no one goes hungry
- Develop and implement system for showers and laundry service for individuals who need it
- Streamline outreach efforts to include health screenings, basic hygiene distribution, and connections to mainstream resources

- Encourage agency staff and community volunteers to follow health and safety guidelines to limit the spread of COVID-19 while delivering services

Prevent Future Episodes of Homelessness (as a result of COVID-19)

While several components of this plan focus on meeting immediate needs, the OAEH recognizes that COVID-19 will have long term impacts for our community as a whole and our homeless service system. To help address future stress on the homeless service system and its limited resources, the OAEH will work to prevent future episodes of homelessness.

Action Items:

- Incorporate questions about COVID-19 impacts into the HMIS Coordinated Entry System and Connect Springfield to better understand impacts on individuals and the system of care
- Build relationships with landlords and educate and empower tenants through on-going partnership with Housing Collaborative and Landlord/Tenant Engagement Committee
- Stabilize households through Rapid Rehousing and Diversion funding (as available) and development of community-wide Case Management Minimum Standards