



## Housing for Health Covid-19 Response

In the spring of 2020, a new virus (COVID-19) began rapidly spreading in communities throughout the U.S. People experiencing homelessness were, and continue to be, at an increased risk of contracting and transmitting COVID-19. If infected with COVID-19, they are 2 times as likely to be hospitalized, 4 times as likely to require critical care, and 2 to 3 times more likely to die.<sup>1</sup> Many have pre-existing health challenges and may lack easy access to prevention guidance about steps that could reduce their risks of contracting COVID-19 – a critical need as guidance on prevention has evolved as new information about the virus has been discovered.

Communities of color face heightened risks for both health problems related to COVID-19<sup>2</sup> and housing challenges.<sup>3</sup> As a result of inequitable and discriminatory policies and practices, historically and currently, people of color are at great risk for housing instability.<sup>4</sup> Half of Americans are “rent burdened,” paying more than 30% of household income for rent, and rent burdens are highest among Black and Latinx households.<sup>5</sup> Black Americans, American Indians, Alaska Natives, Native Hawaiians, Pacific Islanders, and Latinx Americans experience homelessness at higher rates than white residents.<sup>6</sup> With the health crisis and economic fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic hitting low-income communities and communities of color hardest, this threatens to widen health equity gaps further.

As Kaiser Permanente responds to immediate health care needs on the front lines of the COVID-19 pandemic, we also are accelerating efforts to increase affordable housing, address homelessness, and advance health equity in the communities we serve.

### Homeless Response Systems

#### Immediate Impact Grants

Recognizing the heightened vulnerability of people experiencing homelessness, in March of 2020, Kaiser Permanente responded by partnering with the National Health Care for the Homeless Council (NHCHC) to provide \$500,000 in “Immediate Impact Grants.” These grants supported 16 healthcare for the

homeless providers with unrestricted funds to meet the health needs of people experiencing homelessness, while also addressing health and racial equity. Activities included responding to client needs like food, personal protective equipment (PPE), and other hygiene supplies; providing culturally competent outreach, care coordination and services; conducting targeted recruitment to hire outreach workers that reflect the communities being served; and facilitating trauma-informed placements into non-congregate shelters or hotels for isolation and quarantine.

#### COVID-19 Prevention & Response Grants

Kaiser Permanente provided \$6.3M in core support grants to 46 community partners across our markets to enhance COVID-19 prevention and response efforts among homeless service providers. These grants provided flexible funding to allow grantees to address staffing, quarantine and isolation challenges, PPE and supply needs, technology infrastructure, and COVID-19 testing and symptom monitoring capacity. The grants were also used to strengthen coordination among homeless response systems, local public health departments, and homeless health care providers.

### Testing and Care Delivery

#### COVID-19 Testing for People Experiencing Homelessness

Kaiser Permanente partnered with the University of California San Francisco (UCSF) and the San Francisco Public Health Department to launch a twice-weekly antigen testing program for people experiencing homelessness and staff in shelters. Frequent testing and screening, even when people are not showing symptoms, allows shelters to respond quickly to reduce transmission in high-risk congregate shelters. Many people experiencing homelessness have experienced past trauma and discrimination, so effective implementation requires overcoming mistrust of health care and government entities.

Based on the pilot program, Kaiser Permanente supported the UCSF Benioff Homelessness and Housing Initiative and National Health Care for the

Homeless Council (NHCHC) to develop the [Antigen Testing in Congregate Shelters: Process Outline and Implementation Playbook](#) to document guidance and protocols. UCSF and NHCHC are hosting webinars to provide tailored training and technical assistance to support community partners with antigen testing implementation.

### Supporting Telehealth Adoption among Homeless Health Care Providers

In 2020, Kaiser Permanente funded the Virtual Care Innovation Network, a program to help safety net providers expand and strengthen access to high-quality virtual care, and contributed \$1M to accelerate the implementation of culturally relevant, sustainable virtual care service delivery models for patients experiencing homelessness. The Virtual Care Innovation Network is designed in partnership with the Center for Care Innovations, the National Health Care for the Homeless Council, the primary care associations in several states, and regional associations in California. The network will enable safety net provider organizations to learn from peers and experts, test new approaches, accelerate the work they have already started, and develop approaches to sustain equitable approaches to virtual care.

### Long-Term Housing Investments and Policy Change

#### Project Homekey

In 2020, Kaiser Permanente contributed \$25M to California's Project Homekey. This initiative builds off the success of the initial, time-limited Project Roomkey that moved people experiencing homelessness into hotels during the pandemic.

### References

1. Dennis P Culhane, Dan Treglia, Kenneth Steif, Randall Kuhn, et al. (2020), "Estimated Emergency and Observational/Quarantine Capacity Need for the US Homeless Population Related to COVID-19 Exposure by County; Projected Hospitalizations, Intensive Care Units and Mortality."
2. Centers for Disease Control and Preventions (2021). Risk for COVID-19 Infection, Hospitalization, and Death by Race/Ethnicity. April 15, 2021, retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/covid-data/investigations-discovery/hospitalization-death-by-race-ethnicity.html>.
3. National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty. Racism, Homelessness, and COVID-19. April 15, 2021, retrieved from [https://nlchp.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Racism-Homelessness-and-COVID-19-Fact-Sheet- Final\\_2.pdf](https://nlchp.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Racism-Homelessness-and-COVID-19-Fact-Sheet- Final_2.pdf).
4. Rothstein, R. (2017) *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America*. New York; London: Liveright; National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty. Racism, Homelessness, and COVID-19. April 15, 2021, retrieved from [https://nlchp.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Racism-Homelessness-and-COVID-19-Fact-Sheet- Final\\_2.pdf](https://nlchp.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Racism-Homelessness-and-COVID-19-Fact-Sheet- Final_2.pdf).
5. PolicyLink (2019). *National Equity Atlas [Internet]*. Retrieved from: [https://nationalequityatlas.org/indicators/Housing\\_burden](https://nationalequityatlas.org/indicators/Housing_burden).
6. National Alliance to End Homelessness (2020). *Racial Inequalities in Homelessness, by the Numbers*. National Alliance to End Homelessness. June 1, 2020, retrieved from <https://endhomelessness.org/resource/racial-inequalities-homelessness-numbers/#:~:text=African%20Americans%20make%20up%2013,share%20of%20the%20homeless%20population>.

Project Homekey is providing \$800 million in grant funding to local public entities to expand long-term housing for people experiencing homelessness through acquisition and rehab of hotels, motels, and vacant apartment buildings. Project scoring criteria include racial equity and accessibility considerations.

Kaiser Permanente funding supports a services subsidy fund that allows the housing operators to address continuing health and social service needs of people housed through the initiative. To date, funding from Kaiser Permanente has supported 22 properties and over 1,000 units of supportive housing across the state of California. Overall, Homekey has funded 94 projects and almost 6,000 units in only a few months, demonstrating the power of public-private partnerships.

### Mayors and CEOs for U.S. Housing Investment

Thanks to the advocacy of a broad range of organizations focused on addressing homelessness, legislation signed into law in March 2021 included \$19.05 billion for rental assistance, \$5 billion in new housing vouchers, and \$5 billion for homelessness assistance. These programs focus heavily on supports for people with lower incomes and people of color at increased risk of homelessness. Kaiser Permanente participates in a bipartisan coalition of mayors and business leaders advocating for these kinds of investments in proven programs.

### Moving Forward

After the COVID-19 pandemic has receded, Kaiser Permanente will continue advancing work to ensure that everyone has access to safe, stable housing. For more information see our [Addressing Housing Affordability](#) flyer.