

# HOUSING Playbook Summary

## Concerns/Issues | Connecting to Solutions

**Playbooks:** Panhandle Partnership, Keith Perkins County Area, Growing Community Connections (Dakota), Buffalo County Area, Blue Valley Area and Public Health Solutions, Cherry Brown County Area, Families First - The Connection (North Platte), Lancaster County, York County Community Collaborative, Norfolk, York County Community Collaborative, Tribal Communities (Santee, Omaha, Winnebago, Western Nebraska, Omaha Metro), Dawson County Area, Douglas County Community Collaborative, Sarpy, Broken Bow

### Themes and priorities common across communities:

#### Emergency Shelters

- Every community mentioned that there were not enough affordable housing options available before the COVID-19 crisis and homeless system could not meet the needs of the current homeless, with a huge risk to increase homelessness due to loss of wages, employment, and income to pay for housing costs post social distancing (*all the communities reviewed for this report mentioned a lack of housing availability*)
- A huge need for Personal Protective Equipment (PPEs), meal boxes, and hygiene products, especially at all local community homeless and domestic violence shelters
  - funders allow for current funds to be moved to pay for these needs or waivers for state and federal dollars to purchase these additional needs (*housing providers = especially shelters in Douglas (to also include YES for youth drop in and shelter), Blue Valley and southeast shelters, Sarpy, Lancaster (include CEDARS youth shelter and the Mission), Fremont, Hall county, North Platte shelter, and Panhandle (include the youth shelter and adult shelter)*)
- Access to flex funding to pay for hotel/motel sheltering
  - Shelters and communities are worried about several particular needs in regards to hotel/motel access. (*housing providers = especially shelters in Douglas (to also include YES for youth drop in and shelter), Blue Valley and southeast shelters, Sarpy, Lancaster (include Cedars youth shelter and the Mission), Fremont, Hall county, North Platte shelter, and Panhandle (include the youth shelter and adult shelter. In addition, the communities of Dakota, Broken Bow, Dawson, Keith, York, and Cherry)*)
  - If someone in the shelter care is COVID-19 positive – community shelters believe that utilizing hotel/motels could be used to shelter the non-quarantined residents would be a solution while the positive COVID-19 resident was isolated at the shelter
  - Another reason for increased hotel/motel funds is in anticipation of staff becoming ill with COVID-19 and have to quarantine at home

- Shelters are worried that to maintain licensing and other practice standards that have staff ratios, that if too many staff become sick and cannot report to work that the shelter will need to close - use hotel/motel as a temporary shelter.

## Rental, mortgage, and utilities assistance

- Needed for current renters and home owners (*Housing providers, Dakota, Dodge, Hall, Buffalo, Panhandle, North Platte, Nebraska City, Blue Valley, Cherry, Columbus, Lancaster, Douglas, York, and Sarpy*)
  - Fear and anxiety – every community and almost all providers are worried that families will fall behind in rental payments and utilities – once the moratoriums and stays on shut offs end – there could be a large increase of homeless individuals
    - . current need vs. future need – some communities are seeing an increase currently but most are anticipating a large increase in assistance around May
    - . Families and youth may have tax returns to assist
    - . Families affected by 2019 floods still have FEMA rental assistance through June but then the flood rental assistance ends), and job losses could last for 3 to 6 months depending on how quickly people can return to employment
- Increased Need for Social Messaging – the majority of communities and providers expressed a need for a public campaign to encourage people to use their stimulus checks in a way that has sound financial practices attached
  - Public reminders that there may not be utility shut offs or evictions but debts still need to be paid
  - Community Financial well-being efforts and personal finance best practices. (*Housing providers, Dodge, Hall, Buffalo, Panhandle, Blue Valley, Columbus, Lancaster, Douglas, and Sarpy*)
  - Public campaign for personal financial best practices so people are reminded to use their stimulus checks and public benefits in a way the limit the economic fallout once social distancing has ended.

## Themes found in housing section, but not related to housing

- **Increase in needs** by individuals and new individuals who have not accessed supports and resources in the past with each community – there is an increase in a variety of needs = food, shelter, technology, and mental health. (*Housing providers, Blue Valley, Dodge, Hall, Buffalo, Panhandle, Columbus, Lancaster, Douglas, York, and Sarpy*)
- **Increase in isolation** (not particular to housing) but due to individuals social distancing seniors, youth, and vulnerable populations are experiencing increased isolation and mental health needs (*all the communities listed above mentioned needs and concerns with isolation*)
- **Increase utilization of telehealth** – communities and individuals are accessing mental health services through telehealth (*Housing providers, Blue Valley, Sarpy, Douglas, Lancaster, Dodge, and Hall*)

## Unique needs and disparities

- Reported that Lincoln and balance of state shelters are running utilizations levels below capacity (some are at capacity but overall, the system is below capacity)
  - Expectation is that there is an increase in unsheltered individuals on the streets, but street outreach programs are not reporting an increase in unsheltered – CoCs are still looking for answers for this phenomenon
  - Expectations are that people are sheltering with friends or family but that this will change once relationships are stressed past fear of COVID-19. (*housing providers = especially shelters in Douglas (to also include YES for youth drop in and shelter), Blue Valley and southeast shelters, Sarpy, Lancaster (include Cedars youth shelter and the Mission), Fremont, Hall county, North Platte shelter, and Panhandle (include the youth shelter and adult shelter)*)
- Food supply for shelters – shelters rely on food donations to meet the food needs of their residents
  - Much of these donations have stopped or been rerouted to schools or other food insecurity efforts
  - increased the need for shelters budgets to purchase food as a resource that was previously mostly provided through donations. (*housing providers = especially shelters in Douglas (to also include YES for youth drop in and shelter), Blue Valley and southeast shelters, Sarpy, Lancaster (include CEDARS youth shelter and the Mission), Fremont, Hall County, North Platte shelter, and Panhandle (include the youth shelter and adult shelter.)*)
- Shelters statewide need access to nursing and health care providers
  - Many shelters have seen support services from medical providers (visiting nurses, clinics, doctors, dental providers, etc.) decrease or completely close
  - Increased the need for their staff to take blood pressures, hand out meds, and other basic medical services which they are not trained or qualified to perform (*housing providers = especially shelters in Douglas (to also include YES for youth drop in and shelter), Blue Valley and southeast shelters, Sarpy, Lancaster (include Cedars youth shelter and the Mission), Fremont, Hall County, North Platte shelter, and Panhandle (include the youth shelter and adult shelter. In addition, the communities of Dakota and Broken Bow)*)

## Barriers that exist for people to access necessary services

- Flexibility or waivers to use current funding sources to serve the needs of people facing new challenges due to COVID-19; rental assistance waivers based on income or a lack of eviction notice due to moratorium
- In many communities – public outreach has been limited since current resources are at capacity
  - concern is additional outreach will “overload” and/or “stretch” resources past a quality level of service
- Lack of personal technology and Wi-Fi connections to apply for online benefits or make connections to virtual services
- Isolation has led to lack of face-to-face time to develop the necessary relationships to help support people in finding housing and access to essential supportive services
- Transportation in rural communities to move from one community to another for housing vacancies – pre-COVID-19 organizations could help transport

## Workforce capacity related barriers to serve people impacted by COVID-19

- Shelters/providers could use more and up-to-date laptops for staff
- Additional printers and ink for staff that are working from home but had access to a business printer in the past
- Need additional laptops for kids to do school work while in shelters or rapid rehousing placements
- Additional Wi-Fi needs for shelters with staff, school work, and shelter residents all needing Wi-Fi to access benefits and other needs
- Telehealth takes significant bandwidth

## Barriers around serving specific populations (historically segregated neighborhoods, immigrant populations, LGBT youth)

- Schools are no longer in session, so access and constant contact to provide support for youth experiencing homelessness has been lost
  - No current way for systems to check on homeless youth's mental, physical, and emotional needs since there is no longer contact through the schools.
- Domestic Violence, violence against children and seniors is a concern for all communities
  - Without the developed social connection due to services and supports there is an increased concern that levels of abuse could be higher than is currently being reported to DHHS or other traditional ways of reporting
- Increase in survival trafficking – there is concern and an anticipated worry across communities that many youth could be forced into sex exploitation to maintain housing during the COVID-19 crisis

## Solutions being implemented or proposed

### Public messaging

- Several locations asked for a public notice or message reminding people to pay something on each of their bills even if they can't pay the whole bill – Personal Finance public strategy focused on positive personal financing practices to use federal individual stimulus checks for basic needs, rent/mortgage, or other living needs

### Service Needs

- Additional funding to support staff overtime for shelters and hiring new staff due to current staff needing to quarantine or maintain additional staff for support in case of staff illness
- Housing stabilization fund – flexible funding used within coaching/case management services to mitigate housing stress by purchasing individualized needs to maintain current housing (gas cards, groceries, household items or other costs that strain housing relationships)

- Funds to pay for hotel/motel rentals for homeless or those who have lost housing and are not positive for COVID-19 (especially rural areas)
  - Option to shelter youth/families who cannot travel to another community for shelter or would not be allowed into another community shelter due to COVID-19 or capacity concerns
- Increased investment into a virtual infrastructure for housing providers and support agencies
- Direct assistance funds for rental and mortgage assistance paid to individuals who have lost employment or hours due to COVID-19, this would include:
  - Operation costs to coordinate between multiple philanthropic organizations, CoCs for the homeless, and state/federal resources
  - In addition – the coordination would also include working with landlord associations, CAPS, and management companies to provide assistance until the federal and state resources could be aligned
  - Damage mitigation fund for landlords and Hotel/motel to recoup loss or damages due to housing vulnerable populations during social distancing
- Additional funding and coordination with NDE to utilize school nurses to provide nursing services to homeless youth in shelters

## Other findings

- Social Isolation: Youth and seniors are experiencing high levels of isolation and mental health needs due to social distancing
- DHHS: Adoptions not being finalized due to COVID-19 concerns
- Reports that individuals are having trouble applying or being eligible for unemployment insurance