



Multnomah
County

JOINT OFFICE OF HOMELESS SERVICES

March 26, 2020

To all of our providers and community partners,

We wanted to take a moment to share an update about some of the recent changes we've been making in our shelter system as we prepare for COVID-19.

And because we rely on our providers and partners to share information, we're also asking for your help clarifying and sharing with your clients some of the details and important limitations around this work. We particularly need assistance clarifying some of the incorrect information that's been circulating around access to motel spaces and shelter beds.

As many of you know, we've been working for weeks to space out our shelter system to comply with social distancing guidance from Public Health officials. Shelters have remained open and are still operating; they did not close. But many providers have limited or paused their intakes so they could achieve that safer social spacing.

To help with that, the Joint Office is working on three fronts:

Spreading out Existing Beds into Social Distancing Shelters: Over the past several days, we spread beds into two new spaces, the Charles Jordan Community Center and the Oregon Convention Center. A third site will open soon at the East Portland Community Center, with a fourth likely to follow.

These spaces, we must be clear, **do not add new capacity to the system. They are being filled by people who are already in shelter.** Beds in these spaces have not been opened to the general public. **Walk-ins and drop-offs cannot be accommodated.**

Without new spaces to spread out beds, shelter providers have limited or paused intakes as they've tried to create more space. As these moves happen, shelter providers are hopeful they can resume intakes.

Motel-based Respite Program for People Experiencing Homelessness

We are also setting up shelter in motel settings that will provide individual rooms for **people already in our shelters** who are symptomatic with respiratory illness and can't remain in shelters while awaiting a determination of their health condition. **These sites are not open to the general public.** They will help space our shelters out further. We will share the referral process for this particular program when it is finalized.

Like our social distancing shelters, **walk-ins and drop-offs cannot be accommodated**. As you and your clients hear about sites opening, we're asking if you can help us manage expectations and make that clear.

Other interventions

As we've worked up to these recent steps, we kept our winter shelters open and gave our shelter providers some limited ability to use motel vouchers to place vulnerable people already in shelter.

We have heard from many of you that there's been great interest in these vouchers. **We regret that the message about this limited strategy wasn't communicated clearly**. The vouchers used by our providers were only available for people already in shelter, and in limited numbers meant to help provide social distancing space.

We're asking if you can help us manage expectations and workloads for referring agencies like 211 by sharing that **motel vouchers currently are not available for the general public or for self-referral**. They are another spacing tool for shelter providers.

Our goal moving forward

All of these moves are meant to provide healthier social-distancing space, so we can limit the spread of COVID-19 in our congregate settings. And once we have achieved that spacing, we hope that intakes into shelter can return to something closer to normal. **We will continue to communicate about that progress and send a clear signal when that time has come**.

Sincerely,



Marc Jolin, Director
Joint Office of Homeless Services / A Home For Everyone