



April 16, 2020

Community Leader,

Our community is facing dual threats to public health: homelessness and the COVID-19 pandemic. We are experiencing unprecedented rates of homelessness and housing insecurity in Central Oregon, and our most vulnerable residents are now facing this critical public health threat without the ability to follow even the most basic CDC or OHA guidelines.

“Given close quarters, compromised immune systems, and an aging population, people experiencing homelessness are exceptionally vulnerable to communicable diseases, not excluding the current outbreak of coronavirus, COVID-19.”

-National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty

The potentially devastating impacts of a COVID-19 hotspot among Central Oregon’s unsheltered residents threatens not only people who are experiencing homelessness but also the health and well-being of all Central Oregonians. Protecting our most vulnerable residents is not only a public health issue, we are asking for your help to act quickly and decisively, to protect our public health and economic well-being.

On April 14, Governor Brown laid out a public health framework for reopening Oregon that includes “Strategies that work for hardest hit and vulnerable populations, including nursing homes and people experiencing homelessness” before the state can begin to ease its current stay-at-home restrictions. We have not yet implemented those strategies in Central Oregon.

Without additional emergency resources and funding, the ability of service providers to maintain and expand vital services to the homeless community is unsustainable. Among the added challenges we face:

- All winter shelters are now closed. Those men and women have returned to unsheltered homelessness on our streets, parks, and public land.
- Reduction by over 50% of already limited year-round local shelter capacity and a hold on new intakes due to the need for physical distancing.
- Disruption of food supply during a time of increased demand at food pantries and community kitchens from all members of our community.
- Discontinuation of Community Shower Truck operations, closure of libraries, meal sites and other space people use to access services, basic hygiene, and shelter from the weather.
- Extreme shortage or lack of personal protective equipment (PPE) for service providers and people who are sleeping outside or in shelters.

A coordinated response by the EOC and our local governments working in partnership with our service providers is critical. While we appreciate the hard work the EOC and its partners have undertaken, we are concerned that, without strong and immediate action to identify alternative

shelter spaces and service distribution centers, the spread of COVID-19 within our homeless community could quickly overburden our regional healthcare system.

Other cities and counties have prioritized plans to address these challenges. Central Oregon should learn from their experiences. Using Central Oregon's 2019 Point In Time count data and projections from nationally regarded researcher, Dennis Culhane, PhD, we can project the potential impact of COVID-19 on our local homeless community:

- Will require hospitalization: **109***
- Projected number of fatalities: **26**

**Approximate projections based on Central Oregon 2019 Point In Time Count data & Dennis Culhane's March 2020 report¹. Detailed data methodology attached.*

In normal times, this would challenge our regional healthcare system, and these are far from normal times. To mitigate against this possibility, homeless service providers are united in requesting action by our city, county, and state entities to achieve the following:

- Establishment of alternative isolation and quarantine units (possibly motel rooms) including supportive services for people who are symptomatic or COVID+ and unable to safely isolate at home but who do not require hospital-level care.
- Designation of sanctioned encampments, safe parking areas and/or large indoor shelter spaces that allow for safe distancing while allowing access to meet basic needs and reducing unsheltered homelessness.
- Expanded access to basic hygiene, health services and symptom monitoring in camps and in shelters.
- Increased availability of food and meal services.
- PPE for frontline service providers, and priority testing for people who are unsheltered.

To meet these goals, we recommend the following strategies, which are being successfully implemented by other jurisdictions:

- Master leasing hotel rooms. We ask for the State of Oregon to assume liability to reduce the burden on local resources.
- Open schools and/or college dormitories as temporary shelters. Schools offer large internal spaces, smaller rooms, large parking areas and open spaces that could quickly be adapted to meet the needs. This will require requesting the governor or the state board of education to direct school systems to make buildings available.
- Using the Deschutes County Fairgrounds for temporary shelter. The fairgrounds can accommodate indoor shelter, safe parking and dispersed camping.
- Dedicated assistance from public health, and other agencies to help monitor, staff and support these sites.

In addition, service providers immediately need increased and more flexible funding to:

¹ Culhane, D., Treglia, D., Steif, K., Kuhn, R., & Byrne, T. (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.

- Maintain and expand critical services.
- Provide PPE, cleaning supplies, and implement best practices for the safety of clients, service providers and caregivers
- Provide necessary staffing to meet the increased need and replace service providers who require isolation or quarantine.
- Ensure that currently housed individuals remain housed.

We thank you for your attention to this matter. We look forward to your continued partnership as we work together to address these critical needs.

Sincerely on behalf of the Homeless Leadership Coalition and community partners,



Colleen Thomas
Cochair
Homeless Leadership Coalition



James M. Cook
Cochair
Homeless Leadership Coalition

NeighborImpact

Providing for the sanitation, health and safety of residents is a core function of local government, and always has been. No other entity has the resources, liability protection and authority that will allow this. The homeless are the forgotten at risk population in this pandemic. Engagement from local government is essential if the community hopes to adequately address public health in this extraordinary time.

Scott Cooper
Executive Director

Shepherds House

As volunteer medical director for Shepherd's House Ministries, I am extremely concerned about the welfare of our 40 male and female with children residents in our facilities which offer no means to safely isolate or quarantine. With recent reports of COVID19 rapid and extensive transmission in homeless shelters, nursing homes, retirement homes, prisons, and the US Navy, such an event in our facilities would be devastating. Isolation and quarantine alternatives are critically needed in our community.

Randall Jacobs MD
Medical Director, Board Chairperson, Shepherds House

Shepherds House

We desperately need a remote site in preparation for COVID-19 positive people in our shelter and program system. We work with people who have serious and complicated health issues, and our inability to isolate puts the entire population including staff at risk. I would strongly suggest we utilize the Deschutes county fairgrounds as a positive COVID-19 isolation site to respond to homeless throughout the tri-county area.

Secondly, we need the ability to test widely all who are currently in shelters, and homeless camps. Evidence is mounting around the country that many asymptomatic people are in shelters spreading COVID-19 to the shelter population, staff and general public.

I would also like to see more PPE made available for staff, program residents and homeless accessing services.

Lastly, the current shelter at the sheriff's department closed down last week. Starting in a couple weeks the move to clean up Juniper Ridge and move homeless out will begin. During a pandemic the timing of this is a very bad idea for the safety of the homeless and the general public. Moving people out of their encampments at this time could encourage spread of COVID-19.

Curt Floski
Executive Director, Shepherds House

Bethlehem Inn

Our Emergency Operations Center has worked hard to put measures in place, but your help is urgently needed to ensure that alternative locations are established and needed resources are available to help mitigate the spread of COVID-19 in our region. Needed supplies of PPE is requested as well to ensure nonprofits and other organizations operating as caretakers in order

to keep everyone safe. Bethlehem Inn is a dorm style homeless shelter with communal dining room spaces for both adults and families. As a result of following Covid-19 recommendations, we have had to keep our occupancy at a reduced number of residents in order to hold to social distancing requirements. It is a grave concern that if one of our residents would contract Covid-19, our whole population would be at risk without an alternative location (like hotel rooms) for individuals to reside in order to not transmit to others that are living in close proximity and sharing a dining room space. We look to your leadership and political influence to help make this happen.

Gwenn Wysling
Executive Director, Bethlehem Inn

Central Oregon Veterans Outreach

The cutback of community resources/services for the unsheltered community, caused by COVID19 shutdowns, is increasing anxiety, causing a sharp uptick in depression, suicidal ideation, anger, personal conflict. Local government support for PPE, setting up areas that people can come to safely to connect with service providers, other ways to facilitate getting help to people – are some key ways to support consistent service provider relationships with those who are unsheltered, which positively impacts their mental and physical health and their safety.

The number of people needing help and becoming homeless is going to grow exponentially.

To prevent people from going homeless after the moratorium on rent, mortgage and utilities arrears, funds available now rental is crucial in the next few months.

Temporary shelter, following the example of other cities that have opened venues such as schools or arenas that have bathroom facilities, is an obvious need.

J.W. Terry	Kathy Skidmore
Executive Director	Executive Officer
Central Oregon Veterans Outreach	Central Oregon Veterans Outreach

Family Kitchen

At Family Kitchen, we are concerned about our diners who are experiencing homelessness being frightened about accessing food away from camp and therefore not receiving healthy food. We are concerned about our diners who are housed, yet afraid to leave their homes to access available food. These concerns could be assuaged by identifying hot spots for delivery and instituting pick up and delivery services.

We are concerned about the likely lack of social distancing at encampments and the lack of access to personal hygiene opportunities. There were showers available via the Community Shower Truck three times a week in our parking lot and that program shut down four weeks ago.

We are also concerned about transportation, as a number of diners use the bus system and are not considered when changes to the system are made.

Donna Burklo
Program Director, Family Kitchen

Pandemic Partners

Through Pandemic Partners' grassroots perspective, we are seeing a dramatic increase in requests for housing help among our most vulnerable community members. The pandemic is highlighting and exacerbating already-weakened systems within our local and state funding and governance that leave the homeless without reliable options for shelter and consistent access to food. We are hearing more and more stories of people resorting to living in their cars, desperately seeking safe places to park, running out of time and money to stay in motels, needing to leave their current temporary housing situations due to illness or domestic violence, and there is nowhere to send them for help. They are literally out of options, despite their best intentions and efforts to follow the prescribed public health and safety guidelines for slowing the spread of the virus. It is no longer an option to fund or view systemic (and emerging) homelessness as separate from the public health or the common good - they are one and the same. We need immediate action, and Pandemic Partners implores local, county, and state authorities to comply with the reasonable requests made by the incredible providers writing this letter.

Morgan Schmidt
Founder, Pandemic Partners

Bend Treatment Center

Housing is a basic need that is vital to improving the health of our entire community. Some of my patients are sleeping in cars, tents or outside in sleeping bags, making it impossible for them to follow public health requests to stop the spread of Covid-19. Their access to running water is even more limited at this time. We know that by providing the basic need of shelter, patients become healthier, and often contribute meaningful work back to their community. By providing safe and consistent shelter and hygiene to those in need right now, we can drastically improve the health and wellness of our entire community in the future.

Jessica LeBlanc MD, MPH
Bend Treatment Center
Mosaic Medical

Thrive Central Oregon

We see immediate need for rental assistance funding *prior* to the eviction moratorium being lifted as an essential need to keeping those at risk due to job loss or change, with housing, from becoming homeless themselves. I see another back-up solution that I see as a need- as some will inevitably fall through the cracks in obtaining rental assistance (overburdened with applications, landlords unable/unwilling to wait for it, etc.) This might look like a regional or statewide policy allowing those that were unable to pay their rent in April-June (or July?) or any of the months therein, due to job loss/change or other COVID-related reason, to apply for dismissal/expungement from any court-ordered eviction that may occur, after the past-due rent has been paid. This will allow those who may still go through the eviction process in court to have a record swiftly taken off their record so that they may look for housing again. It is general practice among property managers/companies to deny every application with an eviction in the

past 5 years. If there weren't to be a safety net for these households, our population of those experiencing homelessness has the potential to blossom to unprecedented levels.

Britta Schroeter Phillips, MSW
Outreach Services Manager, Thrive Central Oregon