



DEPARTMENT OF
HOMELESSNESS AND
SUPPORTIVE HOUSING

TO: Members of the Board of Supervisors

FROM: Emily Cohen
Interim Director of Strategy and External Affairs
Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing

DATE: March 25, 2020

RE: Changes to the Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing's shelter policies and protocols

On March 24, 2020 the Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing (HSH) issued guidance to all our nonprofit shelter providers to that is designed to help keep our shelter guests and staff safe. HSH will be temporarily pausing referrals and reservations into a temporary shelter. HSH has issued specific guidance to adult shelters, navigation centers, and family shelter providers on the implementation of this change.

HSH made this difficult decision based on recent COVID guidance from the Department of Public Health (DPH), encouraging all people to shelter-in-place. HSH paused all new referrals into shelters as a precaution to prevent the community spread and transmission of COVID. Introducing new people into shelter every night puts everyone—existing sheltered guests, newly sheltered guests, and shelter staff—at increased risk of community transmission. Based on public health guidance, we must reduce the introduction of new people in shelter.

By temporarily pausing shelter intake, we will be able to reduce the shelter population in the short-term, and this will allow us to implement social distancing in shelters—a critical best practice to prevent the spread of COVID.

The City's Human Services Agency (HSA) Department Operations Center (DOC) is simultaneously working to open mass shelter and care for populations deemed vulnerable to COVID by DPH, including people being discharged from hospitals, high-risk people living in congregate facilities including shelters and long term care facilities, and people experiencing homelessness who are sheltered and unsheltered¹. The City anticipates the first of these expansions to come online shortly. Once these alternative shelter sites are online, we can further deconcentrate our shelters, and we hope to be able to restart new shelter referrals and reservations.

In addition to this change, HSH has temporarily adjusted the extension policy for adult shelters, family shelters, and navigation centers so that no one is timed-out of shelter during the COVID crisis.

HSH in partnership with DPH and Episcopal Community Services is now piloting a health screening process that will be used to assess shelter guests for the risk of COVID. The screening



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protocol will be first implemented in shelters and then across the Homeless Response System.

The COVID crisis is forcing the city to make incredibly difficult decisions. It is not lost on anyone at HSH, that these policy decisions have very real impacts on human lives.

Here are a few additional resources to keep you updated on how San Francisco is responded to the COVID pandemic on behalf of people experiencing homelessness:

1. [COVID and Homelessness FAQ](#) (updated frequently)
2. [HSH COVID Updates](#)
3. [Link SF](#) (updated information on programs that are open and serving the community)

¹ These priorities are subject to change based on public health guidance.