

Monday January 25, 2021

Dear Community Partners,

Last week we received great news that the Biden-Harris administration has authorized FEMA to reimburse local communities 100% for their non-congregate shelter (Shelter in Place Hotels) for **FEMA-Eligible COVID-vulnerable** people until the end of September. The City is still looking into all the details associated with this announcement but are excited about the opportunities.

As you know, San Francisco has been a national leader during the pandemic by opening and operating a large-scale non-congregate shelter system for FEMA eligible COVID-vulnerable people experiencing homelessness, with our 25 Shelter in Place (SIP) hotels. Previously FEMA was only going to reimburse for 75% of the associated costs, making the SIP hotels costly for the City. These hotels are additionally costly as we have provided non-reimbursement eligible services within the SIP program (i.e. care coordination etc.) and have provided hotel rooms to some non-FEMA vulnerable populations who are between the ages of 60-64. These services are important to the success of the program although they are not reimbursed.

With the new higher reimbursement rate, Mayor Breed has announced that the City will continue to place people eligible experiencing homelessness into SIP hotels, backfilling all vacancies made when current guests move into housing. Eligibility for SIP shelter included:

- FEMA-defined COVID-vulnerable which will ensure reimbursement
- To help ensure that this resource goes to San Franciscans, eligible people must be known to the Homeless Response System before April 2020.

The Mayor has directed City departments to determine if there are additional hotels and service providers interested in working with us to open more SIP hotels. To do this the City will assess the availability of hotels and determine if there are providers with the capacity to operate additional hotels. **The City will consider opening more SIP hotels if both hotels and service providers are available.**

It is unclear exactly how many FEMA-eligible, COVID-vulnerable people remain on the streets. Additionally, we know that hotels do not work for everyone and that we must have diversity within our Homeless Response System to meet the unique needs of our guests.

While the City has made a commitment to offering housing to all SIP guests who entered before November 15, 2020, we cannot extend that commitment to the new guests brought in under this expansion. As much as we would like to offer housing to every single person experiencing homelessness, we simply do not have the housing resources to do so. There are some who would not expand the SIP hotels without a guarantee of housing on the back end, but we must take advantage of this opportunity to move more vulnerable people off of the street, even if temporarily. This will save lives!

We must be very clear about this – the City is interested in expanding the SIP model if both hotels and providers can be secured but we do not have the housing resources to provide housing after FEMA reimbursement stops and the SIP hotels close. We may be able to accommodate some people in congregate shelters or help them with problem solving resources, but we will not have the capacity to guarantee placement for everyone brought in under this, post November 15 expansion.

HSH will remain focused on rehousing the group of SIP guests in the program before November 15th. The Mayor has called on HSH, our provider partners, and our guests to take actions to expedite housing placements, including:

- Asking HSH to speed up the referral process
- Asking provider to lower barriers to housing placement
- Asking guests to actively engage in the planning to end their homelessness and to accept the offers of housing being provided

These steps will help ensure that others waiting for housing (either from the SIPs or other settings) have access to housing as quickly as possible. This is a critical moment for everyone in the homeless response system to rise to the challenge and expedite the housing process.

While HSH is laser focused on rehousing the pre-November 15th cohort of people out of the SIP hotels, we know that there are other people in need of housing as well. Specifically, there are Housing Referral Status people outside of the SIPs waiting for housing. People placed into the SIP shelter hotels under the new expansion cannot jump the line for housing ahead of other highly vulnerable people waiting for housing but who are ineligible for the SIPs. Therefore, we must move more quickly to rehouse as many SIP guests as possible so that we can move on to reopening the housing placement system for other vulnerable populations.

As we expand access to the SIP hotels for more FEMA-eligible COVID-vulnerable people experiencing homelessness we will be focusing on equity in our outreach and placement with particular focus on sheltering transgender people who are underserved in the current program.

The announcement from the Biden-Harris administration is an exciting opportunity for us to expand access to the SIP hotels and we thank them for their leadership on this critical component of pandemic response. It will take all of us City staff, provider partners, and guests, to make this opportunity a reality.

Thank you,

HSH leadership