

## FINDING & SECURING HOUSING IN A PANDEMIC

This pandemic illustrates, as starkly as ever, that housing is health care and helping people become permanently housed will continue to be critically important (see [You Can't Stay Home, If You Don't Have a Home](#) and [Homelessness Is a Public Health Emergency](#) and [The Best Protection Against COVID-19 Is a Home](#)). Given requirements for social distancing, this may seem challenging – but it's possible and it's happening! Find tips below for continuing to support people to find and move into permanent housing and examples from communities that are doing it.

See the Government of Canada's [companion document](#) on how the Homeless Individuals and Families Information System (HIFIS) can support finding and securing housing during a COVID-19 Outbreak.

### Finding Permanent Housing

- **Use the 14 Day Isolation Period** – Use this time to prepare people to move to permanent housing.
- **Call Out for Housing** – Ask local politicians or influencers to put out a call to landlords asking for units, or ask existing landlords already connected to programs for additional units. Now is a great time to diversify the housing profile for Coordinated Access.
- **Recruit Assistance** – Have social services or other decommissioned staff working remotely make calls to property managers. Reach out to real estate agents to assist you in locating units.
- **Prioritize Existing Units** – Prioritize empty social housing units. If vacant for repairs, fix-up for minimum safety standards as quickly as possible.
- **Make the Business Case** – Prepare to make the business case to landlords for renting to your participants. The pending economic recession will require landlords to consider renting to new populations and housing people now can help boost income and keep property management companies afloat. Access ESDC's [Landlord Engagement Toolkit](#) (pages 28-30) and further examples on the [Resources to Recruit and Retain Landlords](#) website page to engage with landlords and strategies to pitch why landlords should work with local housing programs.
- **Offer Incentives** – Offer landlords a bonus for housing people experiencing homelessness during COVID-19. One community is offering a \$500 bonus to landlords for renting to people experiencing homelessness and another is offering three-months rent up-front.

### Securing Permanent Housing

#### Discussions with Client

- **Start with Diversion** – Ask clients if they can access any supports so they can **safely** seek residence during this public health emergency. Staff to work with client to mediate relationship reunification if possible. Diversion tools and resources are available [here](#). Specific webinar on Prevention and Diversion during COVID available here – see [recording](#) and [PDF](#).

- **Emphasize Urgency** – Discuss the need to find safe, decent and affordable housing as quickly as possible to reduce risk to COVID-19 exposure over taking time to find “ideal” location and risk associated with viewing multiple spaces.
- **Explore Financial Resources** – Explore any available relief initiatives available at this time (both federal and provincial, if applicable). More information is available in CAEH’s COVID-19 Resource on [Preventing Evictions](#).

## Viewings and Inspections

- **Virtual Viewings** – Work with landlords to arrange virtual viewings, inspections, or interviews either through video or photos including both the inside and outside of the residence.
- **When Virtual Viewings Not Possible:**
  - Landlords leave the unit unlocked or hide a key for viewings/inspection and once the unit has been viewed/inspected, the landlord/maintenance locks the unit back up or retrieves the hidden key.
  - Avoid shaking hands and keep your distance if you do view in person.
  - During in-person viewing, do not touch anything. Use gloves to open cupboards or touch surfaces.
  - Wash your hands for at least 20 seconds before and after seeing the unit. Take hand sanitizer with you to use immediately after viewing.
  - Avoid entering any shared amenity areas if they are still open (laundry, common rooms).
  - Remember to have high touch areas disinfected after all viewings.

## Lease Signing, Payment and Key Exchange

- **Lease Signing:**
  - Consider using digital lease signing options such as DocuSign, HelloSign, or SignRequest.
  - Use tablets or smart phones – remember to wipe-down screens after.
  - Landlord leaves the lease for pickup outside and will cover the lease through Zoom or another electronic meeting platform.
  - Keep appropriate paperwork that needs to be signed in a Ziploc style baggie so that they can be viewed through the plastic and the exterior can be wiped down with sanitizing wipes. This also allows for safer passing of documents from one person to another when they need to be signed.
- **Key Exchange** – Keys in envelope left at a drop point or through a lock box.
- **Payment** – Set up e-transfer or direct deposit for payment of money – avoid transactions that require handling of cash or debit terminals.

## Move-In

- **Rent Assistance:** Flexible rent supports are critical, now more than ever. Local access to rent supplements, first and last month’s rent payment, and supports to acquire household basics should be evaluated for ease and speed of access. Some ideas include:
  - Looking into redirected housing subsidies or compelling local government to supply new housing subsidies specifically dedicated to people you’ve prioritized on your community’s BNL.
  - Evaluating the process to confirm eligibility for rent supports and the speed of access to rent supports. Work from a “this is not business as usual” mindset.

- Re-purposing funds to provide support with start-up and move-in.
- **Move-In Assistance:** Create a process in advance of moving clients into housing to keep staff and clients safe. Think through how furniture will be moved or how household supplies will be acquired. Consider pre-ordering or purchasing simple set-up kits in advance to limit complications on move-in day.
- **Seek Donations:** Set up a donation platform and ask for specific items. Contact corporations who may be willing to donate or purchase bulk items at a lower cost such as mattresses.
- **Cleaning** – Clean unit before moving in, with special consideration for areas that are touched frequently such as doorknobs, toilets, bathroom surfaces, kitchen counters, and sinks. Provide move-in kits that include cleaning supplies. For further cleaning information see CAEH’s COVID-19 Resource on [Promoting Healthy Practices](#).

## Coordinated Access and Other Considerations

- **Coordinated Access and Prioritization** – CAEH’s COVID-19 Resource [Getting Back to Housing Guide](#) provides ideas on how to maintain a housing focus and adapt specific housing activities within Coordinated Access during COVID-19.
- **Agency Protocols** – Know your agency protocols for staff work in community. See ideas in CAEH’s COVID-19 Resources on [Home Visits During a Pandemic](#).
- **Congregation Protocols** – Check with your local Public Health Authority on limits for congregating within a unit in terms of guest policies.
- **Landlord Awareness** – Contact landlords to ensure they are familiar with the no-eviction policies for communities and provinces – see CAEH’s COVID-19 resource on [Preventing Eviction](#) for further information.

## Examples of Communities Housing People As a COVID-19 Response

- **Peel Region** – [CAEH Bright Spot Blog, June 11](#) - Peel Regional Housing Services launched a housing pilot at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, securing 70 units from two landlords and housing 287 individuals and families out of shelter and off the streets.
- **Calgary**
  - [Calgary Herald, June 3](#) – set up a transitional housing building with 80 spaces to be open for 6 months. They seek to house people from the temporary spaces within 30 days and have a goal to move 250 people into permanent housing by years end. Close to 140 affordable housing units are slated to open by the end of the year through a partnership with the Resolve campaign and HomeSpace Society.
  - [Twitter Feed Re: Calgary Drop-In, April 21](#) - call out to landlords to house 250 from overflow space at TELUS Convention Centre
  - Children’s Cottage Society Facebook Post, April 1 - Rapidly moved all 14 families from shelter into their own homes within the last 2 weeks. Continuing to work to move families from Brenda’s House shelter (where they have own room and private bathroom) into their own home right away.

- [HomeSpace Blog, March 25](#) – HomeSpace dedicates 32 supportive housing units that just opened to COVID-19.
- **Wales** – [Welsh Housing Quarterly, May 28](#) – Welsh government wants to change the approach to homelessness in the long term – Housing Minister announced new funding of up to £20m to help ensure that the 800 people sheltered since lockdown began do not return to the streets or unsuitable accommodation.
- **United Kingdom**
  - [UK government press release, May 24](#) - will be providing 6000 new long-term supportive housing units of which 3,300 will be made available in the next 12 months as part of its commitment to end rough sleeping following COVID-19.
  - [Independent News Article, March 29](#) – government asks local authorities in England to house all rough sleepers and those sleeping in hostels and night shelters by the weekend.
- **Edmonton**
  - [Homeward Trust Newsletter, May 21](#) – have housed 348 people between March 1 – May 19
  - [Getting Back to Housing Webinar, April 30](#) (and [PDF](#)) (CAEH, 1 hour) – Edmonton has housed 199 people (including dependents) over March and April and 345 have been engaged in the housing process from their Expo COVID-19 site. Phoenix’s [HOM Inc.](#) has had 273 move-ins/transfers over March and April.
  - [Edmonton Homeward Trust Blog, April 20](#) – secured 98-unit bridge housing while work to move people to permanent housing.
  - [Edmonton Journal, March 28](#) – Mustard Seed housed 6 people last week.
- **Waterloo Region** – [Cambridge Times, May 21](#) – housed 10 families and 2 individuals in April and will have moved another 15 people into units by end of May. Put a call out to recruit landlords.
- **Kelowna**
  - [BC Government News, May 20](#) - a three story modular with 38 units for people experiencing homelessness is being fast-tracked through zoning to be completed by fall 2020.
  - [Kelowna Capital News, April 8](#) – moved 58 people into Samuel Place, a new supportive housing building that was recently completed.
- **Scotland**
  - [The National, May 17](#) - the Scottish Government has said it is committed to finding long-term solutions for people sleeping rough in Scottish cities who were offered places in hotels to get them off the streets during lockdown.
  - [The Herald News Article, April 9](#) - the government is encouraging local authorities to ‘flip’ temporary accommodations to permanent ones, when possible to ensure that at the end of the lockdown period there are not large numbers of people evicted from their emergency accommodation.
- **Kawartha Lakes and Haliburton** – [Kawartha Lakes website, May 4](#) - The City and County are offering several incentives and supports to landlords to help end homelessness during COVID, including funding to help prepare units for move-in and three months of pre-paid rent.

- **St. John's** – [Twitter, May 1](#) - recruiting landlords during COVID-19 through HomeConnect offering a \$500 signing bonus to first 50 landlords who sign up.
- **Toronto**
  - [Global News, April 30](#) – The City of Toronto has announced it will be spending \$47.5 million to build 250 supportive modular housing units as part of a pilot project to help those who are homeless. Two three-storey buildings with 110 units each will be erected by Horizon North on a City-owned site by September. The second phase will see 140 units built at a second City-owned site by April 2021.
  - [City News Article, March 29](#) – 19 housed, two residential buildings acquired, and 50 additional units identified.
- **Vancouver and Victoria** – [Vancouver Sun, April 29](#) – the province is moving people from park encampments to motels from which they are working to offer people permanent housing.
- **York Region** – [YorkRegion.com, April 26](#) - Blue Door and other agencies in the region are appealing to landlords with vacant rentals units to help provide affordable housing to those in need.
- **US BFZ-C Communities** – [US Built for Zero Blog, April 22](#) – highlights four communities focussing on moving people from temporary shelters to housing and alternative strategies to find and secure permanent housing.
- **London, ON** – [Global News, April 20](#) – City of London asks community to identify housing units for homeless as response to pandemic.
- **Saskatchewan**
  - [Saskatoon Star Phoenix Article, April 17](#) – mayor and SHIP seek permanent housing – getting people indoors and connected to services is the next top priority.
  - [Provincial announcement, March 31](#) - Approximately 1,700 vacant Saskatchewan Housing Corporation units located in 29 larger communities will be leveraged to enable those impacted by COVID-19 to access housing or an individualized space to self-isolate. An additional 1,200 units are available in smaller communities.
- **Washington, DC** – [Street Sense Media Article, March 12](#) - Looking to invest \$71.2M in affordable/supportive housing to end chronic homelessness as “housing is health care”.

**Disclaimer:** This document is a collection of resources and/or ideas compiled by the team at CAEH. Please follow [Public Health Agency of Canada guidelines on COVID-19](#) as the primary resource for all health-related concerns.

CAEH will continue to update this resource as new information or ideas become available. Please refer to the CNH3 website Resources page at [cnh3.ca/resources](http://cnh3.ca/resources) for additional information. If you have an idea or resource to share or are seeking further support, please contact us at [info@caeh.ca](mailto:info@caeh.ca).