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 its possible and its happening! Find tips below for continuing to support people to find and move into permanent housing and examples from communities that are doing it.

Finding Permanent Housing

- **Use the 14 Day Isolation Period** – use this time to prepare people to move to permanent housing.
- **Call Out for Housing** – Put a request for housing units out through the media or your Mayor’s office. Ask existing landlords connected to programs for additional units.
- **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 (for further examples, see Resources to Recruit and Retain Landlords):
  - More assured rental income and sustainability of their investment
  - Support available for tenants and someone they can contact for help
  - Financial assistance throughout the pandemic and sustainability plan following
  - End up with longer-term tenant
  - Contribute to shared community goal of preventing the spread of COVID-19

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.
- **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). Further information available in the Preventing Evictions One-Pager.
**Viewings and Inspections**

- **Virtual Viewings** – work with landlords to arrange virtual viewings/inspections 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:**
  - Digital lease signing options e.g. DocuSign, HelloSign, SignRequest, etc.
  - 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.
- **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**

- **Cleaning** – Clean unit before move-in considering especially high touch areas such as doorknobs, toilets, bathroom surfaces, kitchen counters, sinks, etc. Provide move-in kits that include cleaning supplies. For further cleaning information see the one-pager on [Promoting Healthy Practices](#).

**System and Service Provider Considerations**

- **Coordinated Access and Prioritization** – see one-pager on [Coordinated Access in a Pandemic](#).
- **Agency Protocols** – Know your agency protocols for staff work in community.
- **Congregation Protocols** – Check with your 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 the one-pager on [Preventing Eviction](#) for further information.
Examples of Communities Housing People As a COVID-19 Response

- **London, ON** – [Global News, April 20](#) – City of London asks community to identify housing units for homeless as response to pandemic.

- **Phoenix** – [Home Inc](#) has housed over 60 people in the last month.

- **Scotland** – [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.

- **Saskatchewan**
  - [Saskatoon StarPhoenix 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.

- **Toronto** – [City News Article, March 29](#) – 19 housed, two residential buildings acquired and 50 additional units identified.

- **United Kingdom** – [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**
  - [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.

- **Calgary**
  - 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.

- **New York** – [Curbed New York, March 25](#) – advocates calling on the mayor to ending law enforcement programs that target homeless individuals (such as the NYPD’s Subway Diversion Program); and housing individuals in empty HPD Housing Connect apartments and unoccupied supportive housing units.

- **Chicago** – [Curbed Chicago, March 24](#) – advocates calling on the mayor to lease unoccupied Chicago Housing Authority public housing. According to a report from late 2019, the housing agency had about 1,885 vacant housing units.

- **Washington, DC** – [Street Sense Media Article, March 12](#) - Looking to invest $71.2M in affordable/supportive housing to end chronic homelessness as “housing is healthcare”.

Last Updated: April 22, 2020
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 for additional information. If you have an idea or resource to share or are seeking further support, please contact us at info@caeh.ca.