



Thursday, March 26, 2020

Report Warns Of Pandemic's Threat To Homeless

Ohio's homeless advocates say their system needs a boost to help the population through the coronavirus pandemic and slow its spread.

A **report** commissioned by the Coalition on Homelessness and Housing in Ohio and authored by Barbara Poppe and Associates warns of a "collision" between COVID-19 and Ohio's homelessness crisis, which could create "an even more acute public health emergency."

A lack of guidance, resources and capacity hinders the state's ability to meet the needs of Ohioans experiencing homelessness and at risk of contracting the virus, the report said.

"Thousands of Ohioans enduring homelessness rely on emergency shelters – typically large, overcrowded congregate settings where conditions are optimal for spreading COVID-19," Ms. Poppe, a former executive director of the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness, said in a statement. "There's still time to contain the outbreak, but we must deconcentrate the shelters and ensure that these programs have enough space to isolate and quarantine people who are symptomatic or have been exposed to the virus."

A survey of the state's continuums of care found that 79% did not have the ability to provide financial assistance needed to reduce admissions and minimize overcrowding in shelters, 87% didn't have sufficient space to isolate and quarantine people affected by the coronavirus, 71% lacked sanitation and hygiene supplies to prevent transmission and 65% reduced services due to a loss of staff and volunteers.

"People experiencing homelessness already have difficult and uncertain lives. We're going to keep doing all we can to ensure that they – and the people who serve them – are given the best protection possible during this crisis," said Jessica Jenkins, assistant director of the Montgomery County Human Services Planning & Development Department. "But our county can't do it alone. We need more personal protection equipment, cleaning supplies, staffing, training, hotel rooms, food, and healthcare services."

COHHIO urged state lawmakers to appropriate \$20 million for emergency homeless services. CCHHIO

Executive Director Bill Faith praised the work of **Gov. Mike DeWine** and Health Director Dr. Amy Acton, but said more help is needed.

"Gov. DeWine and Director Acton doing a great job managing this crisis, but we need to make sure homeless Ohioans don't get lost in the shuffle because Ohio's stay-at-home order won't protect people who have no home," he said. "This is an immediate, acute crisis now. We all need to pull together to defeat this silent enemy."

COHHIO has created a **Pandemic Emergency Fund** with \$500,000 from its rainy day fund to provide immediate help, and it has grown to more than \$660,000 with support from other donors. The organization planned to start issuing checks Thursday to local homeless agencies.

State leaders have said they are working on ways to address the threat facing the homeless population.

"It's clearly a problem when you have that many people together, but you also can't just turn them out," Gov. DeWine said Wednesday. "We're working on that and will have more coming. It is a unique challenge."

Dr. Acton said the situation has been difficult for people who have medical conditions and experience homelessness.

"It's an ongoing thing we're fighting to address in our communities," she said. "There is a ton of behind-the-scenes work by some of the most amazing people and leaders in the field."

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