

## **Press Advisory: City and County’s Initial Efforts to Support Homeless People Against COVID-19 are Inadequate and Require Immediate Increase in Resources**

**For Immediate Release: 03/13/2020**

**From:** No Place to Go Working Group<sup>1</sup>

**Contacts:** Charles Porter, Social Model Recovery Systems- (o) (213) 622-1622; (c) (213) 440-4891  
Greg Spiegel, Inner City Law Center - (213) 891-3227  
Dorit Waldman, Project 180 - (818) 943-6606

---

Because of the high proportion of seniors and people with pre-existing health conditions, homeless residents of Skid Row and encampments throughout Los Angeles County are more likely to be victims of COVID-19<sup>2</sup> than housed residents—yet despite some initial efforts in some areas, insufficient public resources have been dedicated to allow them to protect themselves. In light of this, the No Place to Go Working Group is **urging the City and County of Los Angeles to work together to prevent the spread of COVID-19 by doing the following:**

### **Immediate Interventions For Homeless People in the Skid Row Community:**

1. Engage and consult with homeless residents during the creation and implementation of protocols.<sup>3</sup>
2. Immediately provide one handwashing station on each corner (four at each intersection).
  - a. For those with limited mobility who are unable to access handwashing stations, supply 10,000 (2oz) containers and 1,000 (6oz) containers of hand sanitizer. Hand sanitizer is a solution only for those unable to reach stations; it is not a substitute for the CDCs primary recommendation of using soap and water, lathering and scrubbing hands for 20 seconds.<sup>4</sup>
3. Immediately provide 140 public toilets, at a ratio of 20 unsheltered people per toilet.
4. Immediately provide 56 hydration stations, at a ratio of 50 unsheltered people per station.
5. Immediately provide additional mobile laundry facilities.

### **Immediate Interventions For Homeless People Living in Encampments throughout L.A. County:**

1. Engage and consult with homeless residents during the creation and implementation of protocols.<sup>5</sup>
2. Immediately provide handwashing stations at a ratio of 10 unsheltered people per station.
3. Immediately provide public toilets at a ratio of 20 unsheltered people per toilet.
4. Immediately provide hydration stations at a ratio of 50 unsheltered people per hydration station.
5. Immediately provide additional mobile laundry facilities.

---

<sup>1</sup> “No Place To Go” is a project of the Los Angeles Central Providers Collaborative, with the goal of auditing public access to Skid Row hygiene resources to determine functionality, maintenance, public accessibility, safety, privacy and ADA accessibility. In 2017, No Place to Go issued its first report on access to public toilets in 2017 (<https://www.innercitylaw.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/No-Place-To-Go-final.pdf>.) No Place to Go is currently undertaking an audit of toilets, showers, hand-washing stations and drinking water. The audit is not complete but No Place to Go is sharing this preliminary information to further the call for more resources to protect homeless Angelenos against the spread of the COVID-19 virus.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/events-as-they-happen>

<sup>3</sup> <https://medium.com/@streetwatchla/unhoused-community-of-echo-park-lake-on-mitch-ofarrell-s-new-shelter-plans-coronavirus-e2fbdcf23f7d>

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/about/prevention.html?CDC\\_AA\\_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Fabout%2Fprevention-treatment.html](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/about/prevention.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Fabout%2Fprevention-treatment.html)

<sup>5</sup> See footnote 3, above.

## **Skid Row and Homeless Encampments Are Uniquely At Risk for COVID-19:**

The Center for Disease Control recommends “frequent handwashing” as the most effective means of slowing the transmission of COVID-19.<sup>6</sup> Unfortunately, this simple precaution is virtually impossible for the more than 2,800 people living without shelter in Skid Row,<sup>7</sup> in addition to the 2,000 people who are sheltered but may be required to leave the shelter during the day.

Many members of the Skid Row community are seniors, have underlying medical conditions, or have compromised immune systems placing them at heightened risk of serious illness or death from COVID-19.<sup>8</sup> In 2019, the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority found that approximately 34% of Skid Row’s unhoused residents—940 people—are over the age of 55.<sup>9</sup> Of the 58,936 people who are homeless in L.A. County, 5,231 are people age 62 or older and 16,000 are chronically homeless, meaning they have at least one underlying condition that would make them especially vulnerable to COVID-19. Even under normal conditions, adults experiencing homelessness face mortality rates three to four times higher than housed adults and develop health conditions associated with old age roughly 10 years earlier.<sup>10</sup> The current pandemic exacerbates these risks and makes clear the need for emergency resources.

## **Hand-Washing Stations: 1 for Every 20 Homeless People**

The CDC’s recommendation of social distancing by keeping individuals at least 6 feet apart<sup>11</sup> is impossible within the sidewalks of Skid Row; therefore, other prevention strategies such as hand-washing must be immediately implemented to slow the spread of the infection.<sup>12</sup> In February 2020, the No Place To Go Working Group, a collective of nonprofit homeless service providers, Skid Row residents, volunteers and others, conducted its second audit of public toilets and hygiene facilities located in Skid Row. The audit found that between the hours of 7pm and 6am, only two handwashing facilities in 50 square blocks were available to Skid Row residents. Additionally, many facilities that were typically open during daytime hours were not open on weekends or had limited weekend availability. Even when sinks were available, many routinely had no soap, and some facilities relied on hand sanitizer alone.

While we acknowledge the initial placement of some hand-washing stations in a few locations, and that there appears to be a plan for Skid Row, it is too little to address the need and full scale of implementation that must happen immediately. For hand-washing stations during this pandemic, we recommend a ratio of one to every ten people. With 2,800 people estimated to be living on the streets of Skid Row and another 2,000 sheltered people who may be required to leave the shelter during daylight hours, this demands as many as 480 hand-washing stations. Given the density of people in Skid Row, we recommend placing a hand-washing station on every corner in Skid Row. This helps ensure that they are accessible to the nearly 750 unsheltered residents with disabilities<sup>13</sup> who may not be able to walk long distances to wash their hands.

---

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/index.html>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.lahsa.org/documents?id=3527-homeless-count-2019-skid-row-data-summary.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/specific-groups/high-risk-complications.html>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.lahsa.org/documents?id=3527-homeless-count-2019-skid-row-data-summary.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3250555/#Sec1title>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/php/risk-assessment.html>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/11/science/coronavirus-curve-mitigation-infection.html>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.lahsa.org/documents?id=3527-homeless-count-2019-skid-row-data-summary.pdf>

### **Hydration Stations: 20 Liters Per Day for Every Homeless Person**

The 2020 No Place to Go audit also identified a severe shortage of drinking fountains and hydration stations—particularly those with spigots that do not touch the mouth of a user or a bottle—in the Skid Row area. Bottled water delivery is sporadic and typically undertaken by nonprofits and community groups who cannot sustain the volume of resources required to serve all residents. In addition, fears of the COVID-19 pandemic have created a bottled water shortage that must be proactively addressed by ensuring access to tap water. Skid Row residents must have 24-hour access to clean drinking water in order to facilitate proper hydration, a crucial component of healthy bodies and communities, especially during this pandemic. Hydration stations must be treated and funded as critical public infrastructure. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) requires 20 liters of water per day, with no water stand being more than 200 meters from a household.<sup>14</sup> Given these stated reasons, we recommend 56 additional hydration stations in Skid Row.

### **Toilets: 1 for Every 20 Homeless People**

In No Place to Go's prior audit, we documented the critical lack of access to public toilets for homeless people in Skid Row. While some new toilets have come online, they have not kept pace with the increasing street population of Skid Row. The UNHCR has recognized that refugee camps must provide one public toilet for every 20 people in order to achieve basic sanitation and habitability.<sup>15</sup> To meet these United Nations standards, we recommend an additional 140 public toilets in Skid Row.

### **Los Angeles Homeless Encampments:**

The same needs present in Skid Row are present in the encampments throughout Los Angeles. Hand washing stations are needed immediately, at the same ratio 10 people per handwashing station. Public toilets are needed to meet the UNHCR ratio of 20 people per toilet.<sup>16</sup> Hydration stations are needed at a ratio of 50 people per hydration station. The 2019 LAHSA Homeless Count identified 17,400 Angelenos who are living in makeshift shelters, tents, cars, vans or RVs.<sup>17</sup> There is an immediate need for Los Angeles to provide resources to them during this crisis.

### **Request to Initiate Response Within 24 Hours, Per CDC Emergency Response Guidelines**

If the City or County of Los Angeles are unable to initiate provision of the resources identified above within the next 24 hours as per CDC emergency response guidelines<sup>18</sup>, we urge them to consider partnering with disaster relief organizations such as the American Red Cross to mitigate the spread<sup>19</sup> of COVID-19 and help save lives.

---

<sup>14</sup> [https://static.wixstatic.com/ugd/32079b\\_5e33a7c942b64a0db0d283dc0cb77646.pdf](https://static.wixstatic.com/ugd/32079b_5e33a7c942b64a0db0d283dc0cb77646.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> <https://emergency.unhcr.org/entry/45581/camp-planning-standards-planned-settlements>

<sup>16</sup> <https://emergency.unhcr.org/entry/45581/camp-planning-standards-planned-settlements>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.lahsa.org/documents?id=3468-2019-greater-los-angeles-homeless-count-vehicles-tents-and-makeshift-shelters-by-geographic-area.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> <https://emergency.cdc.gov/planning/responseguide.asp>

<sup>19</sup> [https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/66/rr/rr6601a1.htm#\\_blank](https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/66/rr/rr6601a1.htm#_blank)