

RECOMMENDATIONS TO ADDRESS THE NEEDS OF THOSE EXPERIENCING UNSHELTERED HOMELESSNESS



Miami Homes For All (MHFA) believes that everyone in Miami-Dade County deserves a safe and stable place to call home. However, many of our residents may not have a home or are at risk of losing their home.

These recommendations are by those with lived experience of housing struggles, advocates and service providers. Their implementation is crucial to addressing homelessness during and after the COVID-19 crisis.



SHELTER

RECOMMENDATION: All unhoused individuals should have access to hotel and motel rooms with wrap-around supportive services.

The Miami-Dade County Homeless Trust has taken the lead and has begun engaging hotels and motels in addition to providing cleaning, food, and behavioral health services. As a result, they have secured over 600 rooms for those who are infected with or at high risk of contracting COVID-19. Local governments should expand on this effort and use CARES Act funds to acquire hotel and motel rooms for every unhoused individual in Miami-Dade - about 1,000 rooms. Funds should also be used to compensate service providers who provide wrap-around services and support.

For example, Mayor Gimenez may, pursuant to Fla. Stat. §252.38(3)(a)(1), “appropriate and expend funds; make contracts; . . . and . . . provide for the health and safety of persons and property,” by engaging hotel owners and securing empty hotel rooms to house the unhoused.

Even as the demands of the pandemic force this new approach to providing shelter, we should likewise not lose sight of the immediate and ongoing need that these individuals have for a permanent home. Increased investments in shelter should be coupled with increased investments in permanent supportive housing to augment the efforts underway by the Homeless Trust.



CLEAN SPACES

RECOMMENDATION: Increase the number of properly maintained hand-washing stations and portable bathrooms.

The Downtown Development Authority, City of Miami, and Camillus House manages 10 hand-washing stations and public toilets in the City of Miami. Miami-Dade County and the City of Miami should use CARES Act funds to increase the amount and availability of hand washing stations and portable bathrooms and distribute them in and around highly concentrated areas.



TESTING

RECOMMENDATION: Increase accessible testing efforts for individuals and families that are unable to access testing sites.

Health outreach teams like Camillus Health Concern, Dr. Armen Henderson and his team, and others are providing tests to unhoused individuals between 1 to 2 times a week. The City of Miami’s homeless outreach team is also partnering with Miami-Dade County to transport individuals to testing sites, while other local governments have also provided at-home testing options to residents who are home-bound (the elderly and those with disabilities) and drive-through testing.

The City of Miami and Miami-Dade County should provide increased testing support (kits, staff, funding) to these health and street outreach workers to effectively test all unhoused individuals regularly.



VIRTUAL SUPPORT

RECOMMENDATION: Develop and implement virtual services to prevent abuse and provide support to youth and families - specifically, a 24/7 virtual helpline with chat options.

The local Miami-Dade Advocates for Victims hotline (Safe Space), shelters, and services remain open and available for domestic violence victims. In light of social distancing requirements, adding a chat or text option to the Safe Space Hotline would help victims who are in an unsafe environment.

Additionally, there are no youth-specific hotlines available in Miami-Dade County. Adding chat and text options to the 211 Helpline (managed by Jewish Community Services) could make it more accessible to youth.



YOUTH ACCESS

RECOMMENDATION: Ensure low-income families and youth experiencing housing struggles access emergency financial aid and rental assistance.

Philanthropy and the public sector, such as the United Way, Miami-Dade County Public Housing and Community Development, and Educate Tomorrow, have provided such assistance. These programs can be enhanced by additional funding and allocating funds to make programs specific to youth experiencing homelessness or housing instability.

Specifically, flexible spending allows service providers to assist unaccompanied homeless youth (young people under the age of 25 without a parent or legal guardian who do not have a permanent place to sleep) and provide access to direct financial aid - in the form of gift cards, directly paying vendors or landlords, and to financially support emergency needs.



PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT (PPE)

RECOMMENDATION: Provide more personal protective equipment (PPE) for teams supporting homeless populations and those experiencing homelessness.

ACT-2, a veteran-founded non-profit, is matching mask purchases and donating masks to homeless service providers, outreach workers, and aging homeless individuals. The State and other private partners should provide funding for more PPE and sanitation products to housing providers and those experiencing homelessness.

