

Housing security is a significant factor in COVID-19 prevention and treatment. With millions of people losing wages and other benefits due to the pandemic, many are at high risk for eviction and homelessness during stay-at-home and social distancing measures. In addition, residents of crowded, low-income housing and shelters are less able to adequately practice social distancing, potentially hastening the spread of the virus.

The AHA offers five actions hospitals and health systems can take to address housing instability and improve health in their communities.



1. Screening Patients for Social Needs and Connecting with Community Partners

Overcrowding, whether in a cramped home or in a congregate shelter setting, increases the likelihood that individuals will contract the virus and spread it to others. Unsafe homes expose individuals to dangerous environmental threats, including poor air quality, mold and lead, which may be particularly problematic for people with COVID-19 or other respiratory conditions. These risk factors could be identified by screening and learning about a patient's living situation. To help facilitate these discussions, see AHA's [Screening for Social Needs: Guiding Care Teams to Engage Patients](#).

When screening patients for social needs and connecting with community partners happens, success follows. Here are examples of hospitals making a difference by listening, connecting and taking action.

- [SoHum Health](#) is repurposing its intensive group therapy program as a communications center, and trained staff are calling older adults in the community to identify needs, including housing.
- [Bridgeport Hospital](#) has dedicated medical staff participating in regular meetings with the city's [Coordinated Access Network](#) of homeless providers to share medical guidelines for shelter and hotel protocols and connect patients to resources.
- [Penn Medicine Lancaster General Health](#) is expanding its courtesy transportation service, giving individuals experiencing homelessness rides to COVID-19 testing sites or to a quarantine hotel.

For additional information about meeting the social needs of patients during COVID-19, see AHA's [Awareness of Social Needs Can Help Address Health Inequity during COVID-19](#).

2. Informing Patients and Employees about Available Housing Resources and Protections

Already, millions of Americans have seen reduced hours or lost jobs entirely due to the pandemic. The impact is highly pronounced for workers in low-wage jobs, especially in the service, hospitality and entertainment industries. But health care workers have been affected too. A sudden loss of wages can interfere with mortgage and rental payments.

Hospitals and health systems can share information with patients and employees about local, state and national rent and mortgage protections. Medical-legal partnership programs could provide assistance to patients. Hospital employee assistance programs and human resources departments can help health care workers. Check out these organizations to learn more about current emergency rent and mortgage protections:

- [Consumer Financial Protection Bureau](#)
- [National Council of State Housing Agencies](#)
- [National Low Income Housing Coalition](#)

3. Providing Access to Safe, Temporary Living Arrangements for Patients and Employees

As COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations increase in U.S. cities at different times, patients as well as employees may require access to temporary living arrangements to mitigate the spread.

For example, the [city of Chicago](#) helped broker a deal between local hospitals and five hotels to repurpose empty rooms for patients. The hotels 1) house people who are waiting for test results but cannot return home, 2) quarantine high-risk healthy individuals who cannot stay at home because of an ill family member and 3) isolate people who have been diagnosed with COVID-19 but cannot return home because of their living situation.

For additional information on quarantine hotels, check out a resource from the [Camden Coalition of Healthcare Providers' National Center for Complex Health and Social Needs](#).



For health care professionals worried about returning home to their families after working long hours treating COVID-19 patients, hotels, universities and other temporary housing options are available.

- Hospitals such as [NCH Healthcare System](#) and [HCA Healthcare](#) are partnering with local hotels, universities, rental properties or Airbnb to develop contingency plans if there is a need for temporary housing for health care workers.
- The American Society for Health Care Engineering, an AHA affiliate, partnered with the Center for Healthcare Design to build a hospital-hotel matching service, [MakingRoom](#).

For additional information and action items around caring for health care workers, see AHA's [Caring for Our Health Care Heroes during COVID-19](#).

4. Investing in Housing Stabilization Efforts

Prior to COVID-19, hospitals and health systems recognized the link between housing and health and implemented or contributed to a wide range of housing stability initiatives, such as care transition programs, home assessment and repair programs, and neighborhood revitalization. Many of these efforts and the community organizations managing them are shifting to meet more immediate housing security needs. For example:

- [Cedars-Sinai](#), [Providence St. Joseph Health's foundation](#), and [Kaiser Permanente](#) are focusing their donations in response to COVID-19 on community needs like housing.
- [Nationwide Children's Hospital](#) invests in community development and has outlined considerations for affordable housing and health care partnerships during and after the pandemic.

For additional information about housing and hospitals, see AHA's [Housing and the Role of Hospitals](#) and the issue brief [Making the Case for Hospitals to Invest in Housing](#).

5. Supporting Community Partners in Advocating for Policies that Stabilize Housing

For years community groups and coalitions have been advocating at the local and state levels to increase access to affordable homes. Helping convene partners or joining existing coalitions in advocating for funding and policy changes are other effective ways to support the preservation and creation of affordable housing.

Hospitals and health systems can do their part by reaching out to community groups combatting poverty and homelessness.

- The [Root Cause Coalition](#), of which the AHA is a member, advocates for policies that address social determinants, lower health care costs and improve health outcomes. Housing investment is one of several focus areas of the coalition's advocacy efforts.
- The National Low Income Housing Coalition, Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, Children's HealthWatch, and the National Alliance to End Homelessness together launched the [Opportunity Starts at Home](#) initiative, offering information on state campaigns that advance federal policy solutions to expand affordable housing.
- Healthcare Anchor Network (HAN) members participated in [Housing and Health Policy Day](#) and supported the principles for healthy and affordable housing shared with congressional members.