

**HOUSING AUTHORITY OF COOK COUNTY
CORONAVIRUS RESPONSE PLAN
MARCH 2020**

Introduction:

The Housing Authority of Cook County is closely monitoring the current Coronavirus outbreak. This is a constantly changing situation that we are taking very seriously. We have developed a Response Plan should this health crisis impact our delivery of services to our residents and participants of our housing programs. There are many sources of factual information concerning the Coronavirus and COVID-19 which can be found at these websites:

The Cook County Department of Public Health:

www.cookcountypublichealth.org/communicable-diseases/novel-coronavirus

The Illinois Department of Public Health:

<http://www.dph.illinois.gov/topics-services/diseases-and-conditions/diseases-a-z-list/coronavirus>

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention: www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/index.html

The National Institutes of Health: www.nih.gov/health-information/coronavirus

The World Health Organization: www.nih.gov/health-information/coronavirus

It is human nature during times of crisis to want to be overly cautious and react in a manner that we feel is justified to protect ourselves and our families. We should be cautious and take prudent measures to protect ourselves, our residents and those with whom we work every day. This plan provides guidance as to how the HACC can continue our work while being cautious and respectful of this serious health issue facing our communities. Our goal will be to limit the exposure of the virus to our employees and residents and to prevent further community spread. **Effective March 17, 2020, public access to our offices will be limited and business will be conducted primarily via phone and e-mail.**

Section 1

Chain of Command

In the event that the Executive Director of the Housing Authority of Cook County should become unable or unavailable to perform his duties, the Chief of Staff is hereby designated to act in the capacity of the Executive Director in his absence. In the event that the Chief of Staff is unable to perform these duties, the General Counsel is hereby designated to act in the capacity of the Executive Director in his absence. In the event that the General Counsel is unable to perform these duties, the Director of Rent Assistance is hereby designated to act in the capacity of the Executive Director in his absence. In the event that the Director of Rent Assistance is unable to perform these duties, the Chief Financial Officer is hereby designated to act in the capacity of the Executive Director in his absence.

Any person so designated to act in the capacity of the Executive Director during his absence shall immediately contact the Acting Chair of the Board of Commissioners to inform her of the circumstances necessitating this change and shall maintain regular communication with the Board.

Section 2

Communications

The best efforts to combat a serious health issue such as COVID-19 is to communicate clearly and effectively with employees, residents, government officials, vendors and the public. Accurate and timely communications will be critical in order to provide proactive responses rather than reactive ones. Use of multiple forms of communications will be important to spread the message as widely as possible to those who will rely on the HACC now and in the future. These may include:

- Letters
- Mass e-mail communications
- Mass text message communications
- HACC website and Landlord and Tenant Portals
- Flyers
- Meetings (applying appropriate social distancing)
- Social Media Outlets (such as Facebook and Twitter)

A. Employees

When it is necessary to communicate with the HACC staff, the preferred method will be to call for a mandatory staff meeting to go over information and any course of action that may be required. If the situation calls for immediate notification, use of text messaging and e-mails will be used to get information to employees quickly. In the event that there are changes in policies and procedures or work stoppages, this information shall be communicated in writing to reduce confusion and misinterpretation.

Areas that may need to be addressed:

- Protocols for completing work orders in residents' homes
- Responding to emergency calls
- Inspections
- New lease ups
- Use of outside vendors

1. Employee Health Status

Employees are advised to monitor their health and report any symptoms to their health care providers and local public health officials as directed by their health care providers.

If an employee believes they may have been exposed or are experiencing symptoms, they are directed to stay home and monitor their situation while keeping the HACC informed of their status. Employees who

are sick or may have been exposed should notify their manager and call the HACC Employee Attendance Line at (312) 542-4869.

All employees who are returning from any CDC-designated Level 3 Travel Health Notice country (as of 3/17/20, these include, but are not limited to, China, Iran, South Korea, the United Kingdom and Ireland, and many countries in Europe) are required to isolate themselves at home for at least 14 days after they return, pursuant to CDC guidelines.

Employees must not be concerned with the status of their Earned Benefit Time balances, and the HACC will work with the employees to ensure that they remain in pay status as long as possible while we manage the present health crisis.

Absence Due to COVID-19 Pandemic or Isolation/Quarantine Order

The HACC may require employees to leave HACC premises for any of the following reasons related to COVID-19 pandemic:

- a. Return from travel from any country with a CDC-designated Level 3 Travel Health Notice country;
- b. Employees who live or have had close contact with a Person Under Investigation (PUI) as indicated by public health authorities;
- c. Employees who had close contact with a person known to have been diagnosed with COVID-19 illness.
- d. Employees who have a confirmed diagnosis of COVID-19 illness.
- e. Prophylactic distancing of employees from other persons.

Other COVID-19 Related Absences

- a. Essential employees affected by the COVID-19 pandemic due to COVID-19 related circumstances beyond their control (such as school closures) may be granted a paid leave of absence.
- b. Employees who choose to self-isolate or limit physical contact at their worksite for reasons related to the COVID-19 pandemic are required to provide notice to their Supervisor, and may be required to use the appropriate accrued leave time for such absences.

B. Residents/Program Participants

The HACC currently serves thousands of households and therefore communications with them may be limited to letters, the use of our website, text messaging services, mass e-mail communications, and social media. It will be important to provide our residents with helpful

information that is reliable, timely and effective. Written communications will include basic information about the virus, how to protect themselves, prevent the spread of the virus and where to go to find more information. They will be encouraged to contact health officials if they believe they have contracted the virus or are showing signs of the symptoms. Residents will be asked to self-quarantine themselves to protect their neighbors and others for as long as may be required due to governmental action. We ask all of our residents and participants to stay alert and follow guidance from the Center for Disease Control and local public health officials as the conditions change.

C. Vendors

For our vendors who work with us to provide goods and services, we will keep them informed via letters, emails and/or phone calls in any changes to our work environment. If buildings or neighborhoods are quarantined, we will make them aware of the situation so that they may determine if they can or will provide services if needed. Emergency work items requiring immediate attention in an area of concern will be disclosed and a plan to deal with the emergency will be developed in as timely manner as possible, subject to the nature of the emergency. For emergencies dealing with fire or police services, residents shall continue to use 9-1-1 services.

D. Government Officials:

The HACC will work closely with state and local officials to monitor the situation and report any known instances of the virus that have affected our staff or residents. We will cooperate fully with any request for information as health officials determine the status of the virus in our communities. If and when government decrees are issued, we will work to communicate these directives to our residents and staff. The Executive Director or his designee shall be the point of contact for all communication with public officials.

Section 3

Incident Response:

In the event that the HACC learns that an employee or resident has contracted the virus, the HACC management shall immediately convene to develop a response. If contact with public health officials has not already occurred, such contact will be made immediately. We will coordinate our response with them so that our efforts do not duplicate or in any way impede their ability to respond to the incident. The HACC management, working with public officials, will help to determine the source of the virus, take steps to abate any spread of the virus and make recommendations on how to proceed with our daily operations. The HACC management shall familiarize themselves with the current issues, identify resources to assist and recommend next steps. The Executive Director or his designee shall keep the Board of Commissioners informed as conditions develop. Decisions to cease or limit operations shall be at the direction of the Executive Director, the Board of Commissioners, or their designees. If it is

recommended that office operations be limited or closed, the HACC management will provide a plan as to how we will continue to provide services under such conditions.

If it becomes necessary to cease operations of the HACC, we will communicate this via our website, social media, e-mails, text messages and the media. Our phone lines will continue to operate and messages can be left which will be forwarded to staff members who will be monitoring these messages.

Section 4

Prevention Efforts:

The HACC will make reasonable efforts to control the spread of the virus through commonly known personal practices and work practices. Information will be disseminated to staff and residents about coughing/sneezing etiquette, washing of hands and staying home when sick. As a part of our normal janitorial services, will make additional efforts to sanitize those areas frequented by staff and residents such as the lobbies, bathrooms, waiting rooms, meeting space and elevators. An emphasis will be made on those areas which come into frequent contact with hands. We will utilize appropriate disinfectants as identified by health officials and whenever possible use available cleaning products which serve as a qualified disinfectant.

The success of any prevention effort must rely upon the good judgment of individuals in our sphere of living. If an individual is sick, has symptoms, or is known to have the virus, they must stay home and prevent the spread to others. Employees will be asked to stay at home, residents are asked to remain in their apartments and seek assistance from family members or others to provide for their basic necessities. If a State of Emergency is declared by an act of the government, we must follow the instructions provided, regardless of any inconveniences it may cause in our lives.

Section 5

Operational Protocols:

Leasing/Voucher Issuance: In the event that delivery of HACC services is curtailed due to community health concerns, the HACC shall endeavor to assist our clients to the extent feasible, through e-mail, telephone, and surface mail. Applications can be downloaded from the HACC website or provided through other electronic means.

- A. **Property Management.** Leases will be sent electronically or by mail and followed up with telephone conversations to review leases and other pertinent documents. Showing of units will be done in person if possible. In the event that a lockdown is ordered by government authorities, then, if possible, pictures will be taken and sent electronically to potential renters. Move in/move out inspections will be waived during any lock down or if staff is unavailable. If a move out inspection cannot occur, security deposits shall be returned minus any unpaid rent with no deductions for property damage. Lease enforcement will continue to the extent complaints can be followed up via e-mail, text messages or phone calls. The HACC shall continue to comply with state and federal regulations as they relate to the enforcement of lease provisions.

- B. **Housing Choice Vouchers.** Voucher lease ups should continue to the extent possible. Paperwork should continue to be processed, subject to staff availability, via e-mail or regular mail. Telephone conversations should be documented. Lease up inspections should continue to the extent possible, subject to additional regulatory guidance from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and availability of staff and inspectors. Voucher issuance may be suspended if a quarantine or lock down is ordered, if staffing is limited or unavailable, or if subject to governmental action.

- C. **Occupancy Issues:** Program eligibility and annual/interim recertifications: The HACC staff should continue to process program eligibility and recertifications subject to staff availability and further regulatory guidance. Because income certifications are subject to the HACC staff having access to the Enterprise Income Verification system and other sources of income verification, the processing of eligibility/recertifications may be delayed or suspended if these outside sources become unavailable.

- D. **Inspections:** In order to comply with virus containment protocols, inspections may continue if conditions allow. The HACC may adopt a biennial or triennial inspection protocol for all Housing Choice Voucher units during this crisis. Conditions which may affect inspections include, but are not limited to, availability of staff, additional regulatory guidance, known health conditions of occupants of the units to be inspected, and governmental restrictions. The HACC will not allow inspections of units where a known COVID-19 case exists. The HACC will continue to use outside inspectors if they are available.

- E. **Maintenance.** The HACC will use extreme caution when required to perform work in common areas and individual apartment units. If sick, personnel will be instructed to remain home and refrain from performing any work on behalf of the HACC. If residents are infected by the virus, work will be limited to emergency work orders only and HACC employees will take additional measures to protect themselves from exposure. This includes the use of proper protective clothing, respirators, gloves, face masks and other protective gear as needed.

HACC-managed buildings will be cleaned twice daily. Increased attention will be made to cleaning and disinfecting areas with heavy pedestrian traffic and surfaces which come into frequent human contact. For example, doors, handrails, elevator push buttons, intercom panels, and similar surfaces should be cleaned reasonably frequently, subject to staffing availability. This does not include properties with private access or single entry ingress.

Maintenance should take stock of inventory to endeavor that adequate supplies are in place should there be a disruption of the supply chain. This should include adequate cleaning supplies as well as any material or equipment necessary for the safe operation of our facilities.

- F. **Financial:** Our objective during this crisis is to continue to receive and make payments for goods and services provided or delivered. Residents are expected to continue to make rent

payments in a timely manner. Our primary mission is to provide housing, and we will work with residents who experience reductions in income or other financial hardships. We request that during this crisis, rent payments should be made via the mail with checks or money orders. We will continue to accept payments in person at the office until such time as the HACC determines to cease operations or determines that it is best to discontinue direct payments. Residents that have not yet signed up for direct deposits are encouraged to do so. Under no circumstances should cash be mailed to make payments. The HACC will work with our software vendors and banks to determine if we can expand direct deposit payments.

Revenue: Staff, to the extent possible, shall make every effort to record revenues received and to process deposits as needed. Should the HACC be hampered in its ability to collect and record payments, no action will be made upon any household for non-payment of rent. Until such time as mail delivery is suspended, we will regularly check our mailbox to receive and record rent payments. Staff will continue to verify direct deposits through online banking systems.

Accounts Payable: Payables will be processed if staff is available and proceeds are on hand to cover expenses. Every effort will be made to reach out to vendors and keep them informed about when payments can be expected if we are unable to process them when they are due. Payments to landlords should be processed provided that funds are made available from the federal government. Priority will be given to direct deposits. Those requiring a check to be processed should be completed subject to availability of staff and funds. If the HACC's ability to process payments to its landlord and vendors is impeded due to government action or the lack of staff due to this crisis, it is understood that all accrued payments shall be made upon the earliest possible ability to process said payments. The HACC is requesting patience and understanding during this difficult time.

- G. **Landlords:** Communications will be made with all of our landlords to keep them informed of our situation and to ask that they not take any adverse against participants in the Housing Choice Voucher program should housing assistance payments be delayed. This should be done through written communication and our web site.
- H. **On Site Services** should remain available until such time as it is impracticable to provide services on the sites. All residents are encouraged to take appropriate measures to have sufficient food and supplies on hand in the event that quarantine is instituted. In the event that services are disrupted, we will work with state and local officials to make efforts to assist in the delivery of food and services. The HACC will work to coordinate delivery of food to those residents who regularly use outside food services.

Section 6

Working Remotely

Working from home shall be encouraged for those employees who are sick, or have been in contact with someone who has the virus, or have been directed to work from home. Because not all tasks required to

perform job duties can be performed remotely, efforts will be made between HACC management and staff to identify work that can be done remotely from home. The HACC shall provide computer access through a VPN connection or other technical means in accordance with prescribed security protocols established by our IT staff. In the event that proper remote access cannot be granted due to security concerns or connectivity issues, other means such as emails and phones shall be utilized to the greatest extent feasible.

Maintenance work obviously cannot be performed remotely from home, and therefore the maintenance staff shall be designated as standby if it becomes necessary to close the building offices for any length of time. Residents will continue to be asked to call into our emergency call line to report any issues requiring immediate attention. Work orders will be created and addressed in accordance with the priority of the work and the availability of staff. Any staff required to perform work at any of our properties shall wear proper protective gear provided by the HACC and utilize safe work practices at all times. We will communicate to our residents the need for patience as we work to continue to provide safe housing while protecting our employees and their families.

Section 7

Travel and Training

All travel outside of Cook County for the HACC staff is suspended until further notice.

All previously approved travel outside of Cook County for HACC staff is canceled until further notice.

Section 8

Social Gatherings

All social gatherings in HACC properties are suspended until further notice.

No visitors shall be permitted in HACC-managed properties (except medical professionals, HACC staff, approved service providers and emergency responders) until further notice.

This includes all resident meetings and social activities on HACC properties. It is our intent to cooperate with containment efforts and not expose our residents, approved service providers, permitted visitors, or the HACC staff.