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Evaluation Team: HMIS, Data, and Evaluation Homelessness Response Subcommittee

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Evaluation Sponsor: COVID IMT– Homelessness Planning Team Workgroup

Health and Wellness Administrative Division: Evaluation Plan for Supporting Homeless Residents During the COVID-19 Response

Program Description

Ramsey County is committed to continue serving those experiencing homelessness throughout this pandemic and doing our best to align our resources to protect the health and safety of these members of our community by prioritizing the immediate need while continuing to support and sustain efforts with our partners. Under the direction of the Incident Management Team, this committee is charged with identifying and operating sites, resources and support needs for those without homes during the COVID-19 pandemic including vulnerable adults, youth, and families who are experiencing homelessness.

The immediate goals of the response are to (1) establish a respite facility with isolation and quarantine to shelter homeless individuals that are symptomatic or test positive for COVID-19, and (2) provide adequate temporary shelter space to enable the established homeless shelters to reduce their capacity by fifty percent, thereby allowing residents to physically distance. Ramsey County will stand up a team of shelter staff and social service specialists to provide wrap-around services for people in respite and temporary shelter to ensure safety and well-being, public health, stability and housing security, and equity.

The response will promote resident safety and well-being by:

1. Depopulating shelters to support social distancing
2. Providing appropriate wrap-around services to clients in temporary shelter
3. Supporting the unsheltered in social distancing and well-being
4. Increasing the number of people connected to mainstream benefits

The response will promote public health for the homeless population by:

1. Provide access to respite facilities for people who are homeless and symptomatic
2. Provide clients access to COVID-19 tests

The response will use prevention efforts to promote stability and housing security by:

1. The system experiences low exits to homelessness from the COVID hotel/RCCR
2. Increase the number of people connected to housing during/post-COVID

The response will promote equity in the overall homelessness response by:

1. Client referrals into temporary shelter or respite were equitably reflective of homeless population
2. Changes and information related to COVID were equitably shared throughout the homeless community (sheltered and unsheltered homeless).

During the duration of this response, the evaluation team will monitor the response to provide regular feedback to operations and logistics. The evaluation team will also measure the outcomes of the COVID-19 response, focusing on the wrap-around services. As the response to COVID-19 is emerging, so is this evaluation plan. This plan will adapt to the community and County needs to make data-informed decisions and better understand the response using quantitative and qualitative data.

Evaluation Methods

Process Evaluation

The evaluation team will use intake, HMIS, and exit data to monitor key data elements. This will help the operations team identify gaps, make course corrections, and ensure an equitable response.

Weekly reporting on the following measures will continue through the duration of the COVID-19 response to monitor the implementation of these activities. Some of this information will be shared on the Open Data Portal. Total number of clients disaggregated by race, ethnicity, age, and gender will be included to monitor equity in the response.

- Number of residents for each temporary shelter and respite
- Number of residents for each temporary shelter and respite site total over time
- Total over time disaggregated by race, gender, age, sheltered or unsheltered
- Average and median length of stay for residents
- Number of residents that exit:
 - Found housing
 - Referred to housing

Outcomes

Beyond simply understanding who experienced homelessness during the response, the success of the overall COVID-19 response to homelessness will focus on the how well residents were supported in the areas of safety and well-being, public health, stability and housing security, and equity. The key evaluation questions are:

- A. Who experienced homelessness during COVID?
- B. How well was Ramsey County able to prevent exits to homelessness and support stability among clients who were in temporary shelters during the COVID-19 response?
- C. Were clients able to access wrap around services while in temporary shelter?
- D. How well was Ramsey County able to support people who are unsheltered during the COVID response?
- E. Who used the respite facility? Was COVID-19 testing available for homeless clients at the respite facility?

The evaluation team will use several sources of qualitative and quantitative data to determine the success of the response. Sources of data include HMIS, SSIS, NextGen, MAXIS, client feedback, and the tracking efforts of outreach workers and Ramsey County staff. Quantitative data will be disaggregated by race, ethnicity, gender, and age.

- A. Who experienced homelessness during COVID? The evaluation team will use HMIS quantitative data to track clients in temporary shelter and respite over the course of the response. These data will be presented with the numbers of residents living unsheltered and in established shelters to understand which clients and the degree in which they experienced stability. Beyond HMIS, the team will use available data from the City of St Paul, outreach workers, and coordinated entry. As mentioned above, demographics will also be analyzed to understand the extent to which the response was equitable. Some of the key data elements include:
 - # of unduplicated people in homeless programs (sheltered and unsheltered)
 - # of residents for each hotel site total over time
 - # of exits from hotels by reason and length of stay

- B.** How well was Ramsey County able to prevent exits to homelessness and support stability among clients that were in temporary shelters during the COVID-19 response? Ramsey County wants to see a low number of clients exit from the temporary shelter to homelessness and aim to get at least 100 of these clients into a housing program. While clients are in temporary shelter, Ramsey County will launch aggressive efforts to connect them with stable housing. This effort will include relationship building with clients, assessing what benefits they qualify for and their preferences. At the same time, the County will attempt to identify additional or new housing options, including vouchers.
- Who gets into stable housing from emergency sheltered/unsheltered?
 - #/% of exits from street outreach/unsheltered to shelters
 - #/% of exits from street outreach/unsheltered to housing
 - #/% of exits from shelters to permanent housing, by housing type
 - #/% of exits returned to homelessness after 6 months?

- C.** Were clients able to access wrap around services while in temporary shelter? Ramsey County staff will also be assessing clients for their existing connections to and new opportunities to connect them with social services, workforce assistance, or financial assistance services. Intake will document financial status, employment, and health concerns. After intake, workers will review their history in MAXIS, SSIS, and NextGen. They will attempt to build a relationship with each client, assess them for benefits, and connect them with existing or new services and benefits. The evaluation team will use this quantitative data to assess their success in securing or continuing wrap around services.

Success in this area will also include the input of clients. The evaluation team will assess their satisfaction with the services they received during the COVID response. The team will also partner with on-site case workers to conduct client surveys to understand how well Ramsey County did in communicating services and making them accessible and providing respectful and culturally responsive support.

Some of these data include:

- Percentage remained connected to existing services after entry into shelters
 - Percentage connection to new services or benefits after their entry
 - High client satisfaction with hotel and respite facility and support received in:
 - Clear communication of services and how to access them
 - Respectful and culturally responsive interactions with staff
 - Ability to obtain services
- D.** How well was Ramsey County able to support people who are unsheltered during the COVID response? The City of St Paul, non-profits, and State of Minnesota led the efforts to ensure the safety of the unsheltered during COVID. The County also supported the unsheltered in various ways. The evaluation staff will document efforts to support and communicate during the COVID response to provide context for the response in the County and ensure equitable opportunities for clients. Records from the City of St Paul and outreach worker contacts will contribute to answering this question as well. Attempts will be made to secure additional shelter, with the goal of providing shelter options for more unsheltered people. The evaluation team will review how successful the County's attempts are at referring them into shelter.

- Increase the number of the unsheltered that get into shelter (Emergency shelter or COVID hotel)
- Provide information and opportunities related to COVID were shared
 - # of outreach initial contacts and engagements
 - Document content of engagements
- Document efforts to provide sanitation, food, and health care to encampment sites

E. Who used the respite facility? Was COVID-19 testing for homeless clients at the respite facility?

The respite facility was stood up to provide isolation and quarantine space for residents experiencing homelessness. The evaluation team will pull quantitative data from HMIS and Public Health nurse tracking to understand the populations that accessed and were tested during their stay at respite. Data points include:

- # people experiencing homelessness in isolation and quarantine beds
- # people experiencing homelessness in isolation and quarantine that were symptomatic for COVID-19
- Of the symptomatic people, how many were tested?
- #/% people tested positive for COVID-19

Budget

Gift card incentives have been requested for resident participation in the satisfaction survey. Stipends have been requested for guest interviewers (client experience survey) who have lived experience in the hotel/respite facilities.

Timeline and Deliverables

Please note that an end date has not been established for these activities, so they may end suddenly.

Month	Activity
June	Draft Evaluation Plan Collect feedback on plan Develop plans for data entry and management with internal stakeholders Develop relationships for data collection (Shelters, Outreach workers, other unsheltered support)
July	Develop and collect feedback on process evaluation template (Dashboard) Create systems for capturing quantitative process data (Dashboard and Open Data Portal) Test weekly process reports
August	Continue weekly process reports Troubleshoot data entry challenges with staff (expected with program changes) Develop plan for client experience assessment (implementation and analysis) Draft and test client experience survey/interview tools Solidify incentives for interview participation Recruit and train interviewers (some with lived experienced?), identify payment source Meet with Open Data Portal staff to create a public report
September	Continue weekly process reports Launch Open Data Portal page

	Troubleshoot data entry challenges with staff (expected with program changes) Implement first round of client experience tool
October	Continue weekly process reports Continue to update Open Data Portal page
November	Continue weekly process reports Continue to update Open Data Portal page
December	Continue weekly process reports Continue to update Open Data Portal page Troubleshoot data entry challenges with staff (expected with program changes) Implement second round of client experience tool Recruit and train interviewers (some with lived experienced?)
January	Continue weekly process reports Continue to update Open Data Portal page
February	Continue weekly process reports Continue to update Open Data Portal page Preliminary report due
March	Continue weekly process reports Continue to update Open Data Portal page Troubleshoot data entry challenges with staff (expected with program changes) Implement third round of client experience tool Recruit and train interviewers (some with lived experienced?)
April-June (when the program concludes)	Collect quantitative and qualitative data from all systems (HMIS, SSIS, MedFx, MAXIS, housing outcomes spreadsheet, and entry/exits/discharges spreadsheet, Public Health records on testing, Outreach database, documentation of communications and supports developed for unsheltered and hotel/respite residents) Analysis of quantitative and qualitative data Final report documenting activities and key findings

Communication Plan

The primary audiences for this evaluation are the COVID-19 Incident Management Team (the IMT includes the County Manager), Homelessness Planning Team Workgroup and Homelessness Operations Team Workgroup. The secondary audiences are people who are homeless living sheltered or unsheltered, the board of commissioners, the COVID Homelessness Policy Action Group, organizations that support people who are housing insecure or unsheltered, and Ramsey County Financial Assistance Services, Social Services, Public Health, and Office of Housing Stability. Weekly reports will be submitted to County leadership using a dashboard template and external stakeholders on the Open Data Portal. Evaluators will participate in meetings twice weekly to discuss any findings to be addressed. The final report will be submitted to the Homeless Planning Team lead (Director of the Office of Housing Stability) to share with the IMT. They will determine how the report is distributed and used.

The IMT and the Homelessness Planning Team Workgroup is responsible for responding and acting on process evaluation findings. The Office for Housing Stability will be responsible for acting on final recommendations.