



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

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COMMISSIONER

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CSB Executive Directors and Permanent Supportive Housing Staff:

As you continue to implement your agency-level COVID-19 protocols, DBHDS' Office of Community Housing (OCH) is providing guidance to PSH providers and sub-contractors to support continuity of service to ensure vulnerable individuals have access to housing assistance throughout this epidemic while also minimizing risk to program staff.

As you know, individuals in institutional settings and those who are experiencing homelessness are at particular risk of exposure to and transmission of communicable diseases. Ensuring access to stable housing is, therefore, a sound public health approach during a pandemic. Housing stability is dependent on a number of key partners, all of whom may be impacted by illness, agency closures, or restrictions on services.

DBHDS' OCH recommends that PSH programs shore up existing functions, including:

- Communication:
 - Ensure that DBHDS, landlords, tenants, and other service providers know how to reach PSH program staff, especially if contacts change due to COVID-19.
 - Conduct proactive outreach to landlords and tenants to identify and address emerging housing issues before they evolve into crises.
 - Maintain communication with your local Homeless Continuum of Care and state hospital(s) regarding any changes that may impact referrals, shelter services, outreach, etc.
- Health and Safety:
 - Engage with tenants and provide emotional support. Please see guidance on the [Behavioral Health Implications](#) of an epidemic from DBHDS.
 - Coordinate with clinical staff to ensure that individuals' basic needs are met in housing. Teamwork will be essential!
 - Follow public health guidance and agency protocols to minimize staff risk of exposure and transmission of illness. See [Guidance for ACT Programs](#) from DBHDS for some practical information that may be applicable to any community-based service provider.
 - For individuals who are not receiving any clinical services, provide basic education about safe hygiene practices and social distancing. Ensure that

these individuals are aware of COVID-19 symptoms and know how to seek healthcare if needed. These individuals may benefit from more frequent contact than others who are service-engaged.

- Housing Stability:
 - Individuals who are in the PSH referral or housing search process are particularly vulnerable. DBHDS encourages programs identify strategies to permit the housing process to continue in spite of these disruptions.
 - **Until further notice, program terminations must not occur without consultation with your assigned DBHDS OCH staff contact.**
 - DBHDS recognizes that this pandemic is resulting in unprecedented disruption of services and will favorably consider lapses in administrative tasks such as re-certifications, HQS inspections, and housing plan reviews during the acute phase of this epidemic. Please track any postponed tasks and prioritize for completion once the program is fully operational.

PSH staff may be operating under new and evolving restrictions on community engagement and direct service provision. Likewise, your partners will be experiencing similar disruption. Consider how phone contacts, emails, virtual apartment tours, and informational handouts can be used to relay information and support individuals while reducing exposure.

DBHDS OCH endeavors to remain operational and are available for consultation on implementation of this guidance or other routine program issues. If you have any questions or concerns, do not hesitate to contact your assigned OCH staff or Monica Spradlin at Monica.Spradlin@dbhds.virginia.gov. Other DBHDS updates, including the two specified in this correspondence, can be found at <http://www.dbhds.virginia.gov/covid19>.